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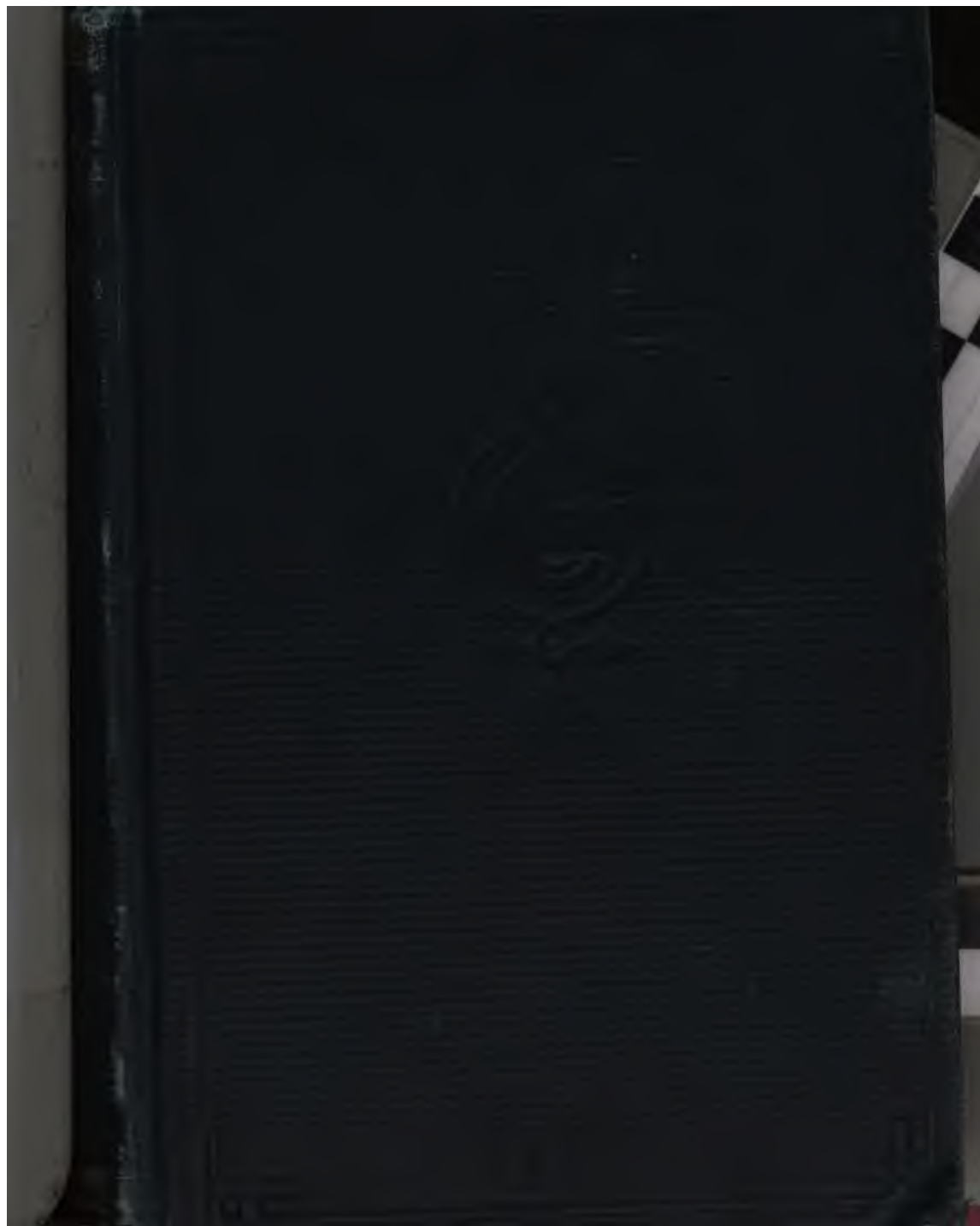
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# BRAXTON'S BAR.



A Tale

OF

PIONEER YEARS IN CALIFORNIA.



BY R. M. DAGGETT

(OF NEVADA).



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*To one whose girlhood songs were chorded to the minstrelsy  
of the pines casting their shadows dimly through  
these pages, and whose dreams by the golden  
waters of the Yuba were realized  
in the land of deserts—*

TO MRS. JOHN W. MACKAY,

THIS STORY OF PIONEER YEARS IN CALIFORNIA IS RESPECTFULLY  
INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.



## P R E F A C E.

---

THE KING—

“ The story pleases me ; but further tell,  
Unless good judgment counsel otherwise,  
Where fact begins and where the fiction ends,  
For it doth challenge reason to believe  
That no imagination gilds the tale.

ALVEZO—

“ My liege, there's less of fancy than you think  
In the relation ; and although my tongue  
Is wed to silence, I may safely vouch  
That in your friendship lives the sturdy knight  
Whose story I have told.

THE KING—

“ 'Tis like a dream !

ALVEZO—

“ What else is life, my liege ?”



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# BRAXTON'S BAR.



## CHAPTER I.

*From the East to the Old West.—Through the Wilderness Fifty Years Ago.*



IN the west side, and near the mouth of Elk creek, a small tributary of the Miami river, in Ohio, is the town of Brinton ; or, to speak more correctly, there, at least, some years ago, *was* the town of Brinton. To-day it may be a thriving country village, with brick blocks, plate-glass windows, street lamps, concrete pavements, tall church spires, suburban cottages with gaudy trimmings and eccentric gables, and other pretentious displays of opulence and taste, grandly overshadowing some neighboring town of newer growth or tardier enterprise ; while it is just possible that the hopes of John Brinton, whose father's farm once embraced the whole area of the village, were never realized,


and that its streets are again given over to the plow and sickle.

It is probable, however, that Brinton has undergone no vital change during the past quarter of a century, beyond the erection of one or two modest places of worship, the construction of a more commodious school-house, and the opening of a few additional streets, upon which improvement has adventured with a reluctance savoring more of prudence than of public spirit.

Many years ago—not much less than half a century—Jared Brinton purchased a section of wild land on Elk creek, and shortly after removed thither with his family from the State of New York. That portion of Ohio was the West of fifty years ago, and those who ventured to it through the wilderness then, girded themselves for the journey with a feeling, fully shared by the friends to whom they gave the hand of parting, that they were leaving the world behind them, perhaps forever. Labor was the staff upon which they leaned. They knew no other. They looked not for results beyond the slow processes of manual toil, and saw nothing to warrant a hope less cheerless as they sought new homes beside the distant waters of the West; yet before a generation passed the lightnings had reached them, and the scream of the locomotive at their doors, with the dust of their old homes upon it, told them that their West and the East were one.

Jared Brinton was a substantial and prosperous

farmer in St. Lawrence county, New York. By prudence and ceaseless labor he had given his children as good an education as the public schools afforded, and at the same time laid by something tangible to meet emergencies. One of these emergencies was the marriage of his eldest child and only daughter, Lucy, to the worthy son of a neighboring farmer. The young man was beginning life with Lucy on a new farm which his father had assisted him in purchasing. The marriage seemed to be in every respect a fitting union, and in parting with his only daughter Mr. Brinton resolved that in her new home she should not miss the comforts of the old, to which she had given sunshine for twenty years ; and while the good mother was supplying the house of the young couple with feather beds, patch-work quilts, home-made carpets, table linen, cutlery and other household necessities, Jared was increasing their scanty herds with contributions from his own farm, and storing their cellar with the comforts which for six months he had been putting aside for that purpose. And he gave her a carriage better than his own, and a horse that he knew was gentle ; and her brothers brought chickens and ducks, and geese, and a cat which was almost as old as Lucy, and in the Spring dug up a rose-bush that grew under her window, in the old home, and transplanted it beside the new. Familiar faces were all around her, and every night as she knelt down she thanked God that she had brought with her the full-



ness of that love which had made her girlhood life a blessing and a song.

A few months after the marriage of Lucy, Jared Brinton visited central and northern Ohio. He accompanied his uncle, old Jesse Cartwright, who was one of the members of a commission appointed to treat with one or more tribes of Indians along the Miami valley, for their removal beyond the Mississippi.

He spent three or four months in the shades of that magnificent wilderness, filled with a hundred varieties of wild fruits, springing from a soil measured by feet in depth and richer than the valley of the Nile, and abounding in the noblest as well as the choicest of game.

It was, indeed, the Eden of the red man, and in the midst of its grand old forests he reared his wigwam, and marked his trails. He speared the pike along the shallow riffles of its waters, and made light the labors of the chase by watching the deer-licks from the branches of the neighboring oaks. He had but to stretch forth his hand to feed his children, canopied with green and gold; and while his log cribs were stored with the maize of the valley, the red deer came almost at his bidding, a sacrifice to his wants. The warm breath of Summer tanned to a darker brown the ochre of his uncovered limbs, which the rich velvet of the otter shielded from the Winter's blast, while his buckskin moccasins, gaudy with the dyes of barks, and

beaded with the quills of bird and porcupine, made noiseless as that of the panther his step through the thicket. The young bear was the plaything of his wigwam, and the soaring eagle the sport of his quiver. The earth and its fullness were his, and the shadow of want never crossed his path. The graves of his fathers were around him, and in the whirlwind he heard the voice of his God. Eagle-plumed and helmeted with courage, he walked a deity through the forests, and it need not be wondered that his heart was rent, and desperation nerved his arm when his bearded conquerors drove him from the land he had so long defended, and the graves which had become the altars of his sacrifice.

Enraptured with such surroundings, Brinton purchased a tract of land on Elk creek, embracing a clearing of ten or twelve acres and a rough log cabin. The owner, who was one of that class of pioneers who are happy only when in advance of civilization, was annoyed at the sound of the axe around him. His neighbors were becoming altogether too numerous along the bottom, and at a very reasonable price he parted with the lands of which he had been in possession for more than ten years, and pushed still farther into the forests.

Brinton returned to the State of New York ; but the stony acres of his old farm, and its sterile uplands, requiring ceaseless care, looked strangely uninviting as he thought of the teeming valleys of the West, and the following Summer found him on his

way to his new possessions, with his household goods and gods. His family consisted of Mrs. Brinton and their two sons, Jesse and John, aged, respectively, nineteen and seventeen years. They were strong, stalwart boys, and gladly turned their faces westward toward the great valleys which rumor, and the stories of travelers, had clothed with so many attractions. They felt some regret that the farm upon which they were born had passed into the hands of strangers, and still more, that Lucy, whose young motherhood had dignified them with the reluctantly-accepted title of uncle, had been left to weep over their departure; but as they plunged into the great forests of the then distant West, their thoughts went back less frequently to the old farm and the loved ones left behind, and the silent cry that went forth from their young hearts was "Westward, ho!" And as distance stretched between them, and, to her, the dearest spot on earth, the eyes of the good, patient mother, who had seldom questioned the will of her husband, lighted up as he placed his strong arm around her, and, pointing to the beauties of hill and valley, told her of the greater glories yet to come.

At the end of a wearisome journey, in many places over bridgeless streams and almost bottomless roads, they arrived at their destination, with two wagons, six stout pairs of horses, and a well-filled purse of gold. They found themselves in the midst of quite a large settlement of farmers, ex-

tending five or six miles above and below the mouth of Elk creek, along the Miami bottoms, and at a central point a log school-house had been erected, where the children of the neighborhood received instruction three or four months in the year, and where divine services were held whenever a minister of the Gospel chanced to be in the vicinity on the Sabbath day.

Eight miles below was the little village of Kenyonville, the center of a farming, hunting and trapping community of three or four hundred souls, where pelts, furs and grains, to a limited extent, were purchased or exchanged for the commodities usually embraced in the stock of a frontier country store.

As Brinton seemed to be a man of substance, the arrival of the family at the farm at the mouth of Elk creek was soon known and discussed, even as far as Kenyonville ; and the next day, after transferring and putting in order the contents of the wagons in and around the two rooms of the rough log cabin which, with a small stable and empty corn-crib, was the only appurtenance of the place, they were visited and cordially welcomed by a score or more of their nearest neighbors. The most of them showed something of the roughness of the frontier, and if a courtly bow did not always accompany their greetings, the warm grasp of their hands and kindly glances left no room to doubt the sin-



cerity with which they welcomed the new-comers to the valley of the Miami.

These greetings were especially gratifying to Mrs. Brinton, who found that she had suddenly become a part of a small community of honest farmers, whose kind-hearted wives and daughters were as profuse in their sincere proffers of assistance as in their efforts to make pleasant to her feet the rough paths of the wilderness, of which it was plain she knew but little. But she was familiar with the duties of Eastern farm life, and her skillful hands soon adapted themselves to the household labors and exigencies of the frontier.

Mr. Brinton's first business was the erection of a commodious and substantial two-story hewn log house in a walnut grove, a few rods farther up the valley. A large barn followed, with stables and necessary out-houses. Through buried white ash pipes or pump-logs the pure waters of a never-failing spring, a quarter of a mile above, were brought to the new dwelling in a volume and from an elevation sufficient to feed a fountain, if necessary, and the huge log cattle-troughs in the barn-yard were kept to overflowing from the same source. The waste waters were conducted to a little depression about one hundred yards below, where, with slight artificial embanking, a duck-pond, five or six hundred feet in circumference, was created.

The gently-sloping lawn in front of the house was neatly cleared and fenced, and the dead and

unsightly branches of the great trees left standing were removed. These improvements were the work of but three or four months, for Brinton's gold readily secured all the labor he required, and before the next snow fell there was little that could have been asked in reason to add to the comfort of the Brinton family.

The large house was well, almost luxuriously, furnished for the locality, and the stout daughter of a neighbor, denominated "help" and treated as one of the family, as was the custom then, relieved Mrs. Brinton of the labor and much of the care of the household.

The succeeding winter was one of unusual activity on the Brinton farm. Twenty or thirty men were kept constantly employed in chopping, logging, splitting rails, and making fence, and before the planting time came in the Spring, the axe and mattock had prepared for the plow two additional forty-acre fields, exclusive of fruit and garden grounds.

With the Spring came the stocking of the farm, and Brinton purchased of the best breeds of cattle, and sheep, and swine, and barn-yard fowls; and while Jesse and John were assisting in breaking up the new fields, he was engaged in the more delicate task of planting the orchard, and laying out and seeding the garden.

Thus it was that in the space of two or three years Brinton was enabled to compass the work of almost half a life-time of usual frontier farming.

But these rapid improvements, necessitating the employment of much labor, had involved an aggregate expenditure of money considerably beyond the original estimates. However, if the proceeds of the sale of the old farm had been well-nigh swallowed in improvements of the new, Brinton had the satisfaction, at least, of knowing that every dollar had been well invested, and that for ten miles up and down the valley no farmer could point to a home more attractive, or to a future more full of quiet promise. Jared Brinton was therefore happy in his possessions on Elk creek, for his cattle multiplied, and the seed of his fields seemed to leap laughing into abundant harvest.

In the occupation of new, and especially of heavily-timbered lands, such as were encountered by the pioneers of the Miami valley and its tributaries, settlers learn to depend largely upon each other at certain periods of undertakings requiring the strength of united arms. This was notably the case in the earlier settlements of the West, and in the raising of the heavy frame-works of barns and other buildings, helping hands, when called for, were never wanting. And little the wonder; for a jug of rum or corn whisky usually lightened the labors of the day, which were not unfrequently followed in the evening by social gatherings, where a solitary fiddler, by every act indicating a profound appreciation of his own importance, graciously provided the music to which the stogied dancers

vied with each other in knocking the splinters from the puncheon floor.

It was at gatherings such as these that the awkward youth in his first suit of "store clothes" met his rosy-cheeked sweetheart, arrayed in all the glory of a calico print, and found the courage to talk to her of the crops and his last 'coon hunt, while the old folks sipped their toddies beside the chimney, and told of the years when they lived in stockades, and plowed their fields of corn with the rifle strapped to their backs.

As the festivities following "raisings" were somewhat too widely dispersed, log-rollings, corn-huskings, and corn-shellings were also made the pretexts for the re-union of neighbors, and the wives and daughters added quiltings and apple-parings. These, with sleighing-parties, singing-schools and spelling matches, embraced almost the entire range of social entertainment in the pioneer West. If they were free from the restraints of polite society, they were also free from guile, and the amusements of after years were a mockery compared with the enjoyments of the corn-huskings and apple-parings of the frontier.

Although the Brintons were richer in the world's goods than the most of their neighbors, their doors were open to all, and the humblest shared alike their friendship and hospitality. Willing to adapt himself to the customs of the country, and having neither apples to pare nor corn to husk, Mr. Brin-

ton unnecessarily made the raising of his barn an event on Elk creek. More than a hundred men came from the surrounding valleys, and their wives and daughters, decked in their choicest finery, filled the Brinton mansion. Ample preparation had been made for their entertainment. By making a requisition on Kenyonville, the number of musicians usual on such occasions was doubled, and no such display of luxuries, and no such dancing, had ever before been seen on Elk creek. This established the Brintons at once in the hearts of the people, and thereafter the general verdict was that, although they might be richer than their neighbors, they were not "stuck up."

The Indians had at many points been crowded from the valleys, and regarded with sullen displeasure the steady encroachments of the whites upon lands which had been theirs for generations. But settlement around the mouth of Elk creek, and along its valleys above, was rapid, and in a few years fears of violence ceased to be entertained.

Although often assured to the contrary, the Indians were persistent in the belief that Brinton was a chief among the whites, and on their way to and from Kenyonville and the river, frequently visited the farm. As the Brinton mansion was the largest dwelling in the valley, they could not be made to understand that its owner was not a chief among his people, and he was always treated by them with marked respect. They were kindly treated at the

mansion, where they often learned the taste if not the name of delicacies, unknown in their wigwams. A slice of corn bread, spread with apple-butter, or some other sweetmeat, was a luxury which they enjoyed with half-closed eyes, in order that no thought of less royal fare might obtrude to mar the ecstasy of the mastication. In recognition of these favors, Mrs. Brinton was called upon two or three times a week to thank some dusky hunter for the present of a fat wild turkey, a saddle of venison, a pair of pheasants, or some other spoil of the chase.

Following the example of their good mother, Jesse and John were scarcely less kind to their savage neighbors, and could roam the forests without molestation ; and when the nutting seasons came, it was some friendly Indian who directed them to spots where the hickory dropped its fruits in greatest abundance, and the clusters of wild grapes and black haws grew to fairest proportions. And it was the Indian who guided them to places where the squirrel had not stripped the hazel, and the trees were heavy with walnuts ; where the paw-paw grew, and the air was fragrant with sassafras and winter-green ; where the mulberries ripened, and the crab-apple grew golden with its falling leaves ; where ginseng flourished in the rich bottoms, and calamus took root in the swamp.

They were known in the Indian villages, of which there were three or four within a few miles of the farm, and were always hospitably welcomed

when they chanced to enter them. Jesse was an especial favorite with Unketuck, the sub-chief of the Elk Creek Indians, and it was the story of John that one of the dusky daughters of the old chief had fallen in love with Jesse and offered herself to him in marriage. Although the story was denied by Jesse, it found partial verification in numerous visits of the forest maiden to the Brinton mansion, brilliantly bedecked with beads and other savage ornaments. As she seldom remained around the premises when Jesse chanced to be absent, it was reasonably surmised that her calls were intended for him. Unable to endure the ridicule to which these visits subjected him, in desperation Jesse finally put an end to it by ungallantly driving his painted admirer from the house.

The Indians sometimes pilfered from the fields and gardens of the whites; but the Brinton farm was never molested; and had an outbreak occurred, it is altogether probable that the Brinton mansion would have escaped the fury of the savages; not that they feared its occupants, but because they had been treated kindly there, and a pale-faced saint had fed them when hungry, and with the white man's medicine healed their children in sickness, and tenderly ministered to their distresses.

## CHAPTER II.

### *The New Home on Elk Creek—The Changes Wrought in Twenty Years.*



DRIPPING the curtain upon the forests through which we have been rambling, with the scent of wild flowers still upon our garments, let us look at the Brinton farm twenty years later, at which time our story really begins, and see what has become of its early occupants and its broad acres.

Jared Brinton had been dead for some years. John had taken to himself a wife, and over a large part of the old farm stretched the streets and alleys of Brinton, a village of some four or five hundred inhabitants, and the trading center of a thriving farming community, embraced within a radius of five or six miles.

In response to what seemed to be a demand, shortly after the death of old Jared Brinton the valley and most valuable part of the farm was laid out in streets and town lots, and it was not long before Brinton became a place of considerable importance. The lots sold rapidly, and in the course



of a few years the bulk of the Brinton estate in lands was turned into cash.

The old mansion, which had been clap-boarded, enlarged by the addition of two wings, painted and otherwise improved in keeping with its new surroundings, still remained in the family, with its orchard, and walnut grove, and gardens, and beautiful lawn, and seventy or eighty acres of meadow and woodlands.

But there was little to be done on what had been left of the farm, and as John had married and settled in the old home, to the great comfort of the widowed mother, Jesse decided to strike out for himself, and with something more than his share of the family funds had said good-bye to Brinton years before, and journeying down the great rivers with "Westward, ho!" again upon his lips, had finally settled in St. Louis, where he became a grain merchant, and where we will now leave him.

The year following the departure of Jesse, John opened a large store in Brinton with what remained of the family capital. He had managed the new business intelligently, and riches gathered around him, and the name of Brinton continued to be the synonym of affluence and respectability.

At the time mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, John Brinton was still occupying the old mansion, with his mother, wife and three children. Full of life and hope, the hearts of his happy household reflected back the glory of his face, and rosy-

fingered sunbeams, penetrating the foliage, morning and evening penciled peace over every door in the house.

Of the children, Lucy was the eldest. She was a sweet-faced girl of nearly sixteen, gentle and graceful as a fawn, and with eyes as full of beauty. The two younger children, Milton and Alfred, were bright boys, of the ages, perhaps, of twelve and eight years. Their mother was an orphan at the time of her marriage with John Brinton. She was the ward of a substantial farmer near Kenyonville, and love was the only dower she brought to the mansion. But the union was a marriage of hearts, and their life-long love sanctified the household, and made it the home of affection. So has it always been ; so will it ever be. Children's richest heritage is the sweet influence born of the love of their parents for each other. It is the golden fountain in the house in which all hearts find baptism, washing away the earth-stains of selfishness, and binding them together with the silk of sunbeams.

With the advantages of the village school Mr. Brinton was not quite content as Lucy ripened into womanhood. So, he sent to Cincinnati for a piano, and in the wife of the Episcopal clergyman, who gladly eked out the slim salary of her husband by accepting the service, found a competent music teacher for Lucy. After the novelty wore away, Lucy had not taken very cheerfully to the noisy instrument. She preferred to romp through the fields

with her brothers after school hours, and listen to the softer music of the birds.

A gentle saddle-horse had been trained for her, and in her rollicking rides she seemed to be as indifferent to danger as if seated in a rocking-chair in her own room; and frequently, until her grandmother, looking into her bright eyes and kissing her health-flushed cheek, told her that she was "almost a woman," and somewhat too large for such sports, would she lead Billy to a stump in the meadow, and, mounting him without saddle or bridle, urge him into a wild gallop around the inclosure.

Yet, with all her romping, before she reached her sixteenth year Lucy became quite an accomplished musician, and, what was of still greater importance in the eyes of her old-fashioned country mother, could heel and toe a stocking with the most skillful of her elders, while her education in the kitchen and dining-room had not been neglected.

"I hope, my child, you may never be compelled to do such work to earn your bread," explained the good mother; "but it is my duty to teach you, and yours to learn, for you would be of very little use in the world without a knowledge of it, no matter how well you might be able to dance and sing and play the piano; and besides, child, we cannot tell what may happen to any of us."

Golden words, alas, too rarely uttered now! Would there were more of such mothers and daughters in the land to-day, to shame into a wholesome

moderation the fashionable idleness and pursuit of empty pleasures which are dwarfing the manhood of the nation, and filling its homes with gilded misery, and its hearts with vice, bitterness and desolation !

As already mentioned, at the time of which we are writing, Brinton contained four or five hundred inhabitants. It was a cheerful, neighborly place. Few were rich, and fewer failed to earn a comfortable subsistence. Almost every occupation was represented. There were two church edifices, two hotels or taverns, several general merchandise and grocery stores, depending principally upon country trade, and a saw and grist mill half a mile above on Elk Creek. Wagon-making and repairing, blacksmithing and boot and shoe-making, had their representatives, and a tailor, tanner, tinsmith, saddle and harness-maker, with a number of carpenters and masons, found employment in and around the village.

These were among the necessities of Brinton. Its luxuries were three lawyers, two physicians, who compounded their own prescriptions, and a justice of the peace and constable. There was, of course, a post-office at Brinton ; but the salary of the postmaster was small, and the office was unostentatiously kept in one corner of his store. The two churches, which were modest wooden structures, belonged to Episcopal and Methodist congregations. The Presbyterians and Baptists were fewer in numbers,

and held their services in the school-house when at intervals visited by one of their clergymen.

The school-house was one of the largest buildings in village, and was beautifully situated near a little hickory grove not far from the Brinton mansion. Yet it was none too large for the accommodation of the children of the district, and for six, and sometimes for nine months in the year, the services of two teachers were required.

To this school-house went the children alike of the rich and poor, and the social distinctions which divided them elsewhere were lost sight of in the equal struggle for advancement within its walls. The free schools of America!—may the grace of God and the good-will of men go with them forever! They are as essential to national freedom as the air we breathe. There patriotism is taught with the alphabet; there the beneficence of republican government is first impressed upon the youthful mind, and there it receives its earliest lessons in the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. And there, too, is taught that first and most important of lessons, that all men are created equal, and that he who would lift himself above his fellows, must do so through the royal favor of his intelligence and the untitled knighthood of his own worth.

It was in the public school that Lucy and her brothers received the most of their education. She loved the school-house and its play-grounds, and the teachers and all the scholars seemed to love her.

She was better clad than the most of her schoolmates, but did not appear to know it ; and if her school-books were always the cleanest in the room, it was because she so frequently exchanged them for the torn and soiled books of her classmates, which, upon exhibition at home, she had little difficulty in replacing with new.

Among the scholars who had grown up with Lucy at school, were Grant Bouton and Orville Bement. They were nearly of the same age, but widely different in almost everything else. At the age of eighteen Grant was a large, muscular and handsome youth. He was broad in the chest, and his limbs were as straight as the hickory of the valley. Frankness and sincerity looked out from his large brown eyes, and while he trod the earth an unconscious Apollo, his unaffected modesty made him almost the jest of his associates. In the class he was the peer of the brightest, but his triumphs in the school-room developed no expression beyond its portals, and his gentle and yielding disposition found strange interpretation in the strength and courage which all knew were his.

Orville was of about the height of Grant, but less robust and muscular. His face was intellectual and handsome, but his eyes were restless, and his manner was overbearing and aggressive. In his sports he was cruel, and the younger boys feared and avoided him ; but he was a favorite with the

girls, for his smile was pleasant, and he knew how to make himself agreeable.

Grant was the son of John Bouton, a sturdy and respected blacksmith in the village, and the father of Orville was Dr. Bement, one of the two physicians in the place, who, with his professional practice, and some fortunate land speculations, had amassed a handsome competency, and was regarded as one of the substantial men of Brinton. He had a family of three children, of whom Orville was the eldest. They were near neighbors of the Brintons, and the two families were on terms of exceptional intimacy.

As Orville approached manhood, he began to exhibit an especial regard for Lucy, the resulting possibilities of which were contemplated with no displeasure by the parents of either. All things considered, such an alliance would have been deemed exceedingly proper; and when Orville accompanied her in her horseback rides, escorted her to church and singing-schools, or took her sleighing when the trees were bare and the squirrels had sought their burrows for the winter, people smiled and said they were a handsome couple, and that some day in the future, when the young man had completed his medical studies, they would be the central figures of a bridal party at the Brinton mansion.

Whatever may have been the thought of others, this was not among Lucy's dreams of the future, if

she ever had any that reached beyond her own happy home ; and when she discovered that the attentions of Orville were made the theme of such comment, she was seen much less frequently in his society. He was by no means distasteful to her, and the whole family spoke of him with kindness ; but if in her guileless heart there had stolen forth, unknown to her, the opening bud of love, his was not the smile that had warmed it into life.

We said the whole Brinton family regarded young Bement with kindness, but such was not quite the case. Milton, the eldest of Lucy's brothers, and a lad of twelve or thirteen, was implacable in his dislike of Orville. He had never been a favorite with the younger boys of the village. He was arrogant and dictatorial, and the tyrant of the school, until Grant Bouton, some months before, after the dismissal of the school one afternoon, had unexpectedly resented one of his insults by challenging him to combat, and in a few minutes sending him home in a sadly disarranged condition.

Dr. Bement was shocked at the appearance of his son, and after dressing his wounds, called upon the blacksmith to ascertain the cause of the difficulty. Grant was in the shop, with scarcely a mark upon him, and in reply to the inquiry of the doctor, frankly informed him that Orville had made, and not for the first time, an insulting allusion to the occupation of his father, and in a fair combat he had made him pay the penalty.



This brought a sparkle to the eye of the old blacksmith, to whom Grant had said nothing of the encounter, and his fingers tightened nervously around the handle of the hammer upon which he was leaning over the anvil, as he said :

" Doctor, I guess Grant was to blame. What do *you* think ?"

The doctor had not quite made up his mind, nor did he exactly like the tone in which the strange question was put. But he did not forget that he was Dr. Bement, as, evading the question, he turned to Grant, and running his eyes over him with especial regard to his anatomy, abruptly inquired :

" How old are you, young man ?"

" About the age of Orville, I believe ; perhaps a few months younger," replied Grant, modestly.

" Rather large and muscular of your age, I should say," returned the doctor, gruffly.

" Yes," interposed the old man ; " he helps me at the forge when out of school, and can use a hammer almost as well as his father. Blacksmithing is a muscular business, doctor—a muscular business."

" I should say so," snapped the doctor ; " and judging from the appearance of Orville's face, I am inclined to think your son had the advantage of a hammer, or a crow-bar, or a mattock, in the fight at the school-house, or a broad-axe, or an anvil, or——" and the doctor looked around the shop for something still more ponderous with which to illustrate the inequality of the combat.

Had the doctor omitted the anvil in the list of weapons possibly used by Grant, there would have been trouble on the spot, and the old blacksmith would have inaugurated it; but, casting his eyes down upon the anvil before him, and appreciating the absurdity of the charge that such a mass of iron had been used as a slung-shot in a battle between two boys, the corners of his mouth twitched with suppressed laughter as he said :

"I think the fight was a fair one, doctor, and the best thing we can do is to let it stop with the boys !"

There seemed to be a belligerent interrogative in the suggestion, and, easing himself down as gently as possible, the doctor replied with dignity :

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Bouton,—perhaps you are right ; but let us hope that there will be no repetition of this scandalous business !"

"With all my heart !" said the blacksmith, as the doctor took his leave. Mounting his brows with the wretched semblance of a frown, Bouton turned with raised finger to give Grant a becoming lecture ; but the boy was gone, and the father did not call him back.

This ended Orville's tyranny on the playgrounds, and Grant became a greater favorite than ever with the younger boys. But it was not the insult alone that nerved Grant's arm and energized his assault upon young Bement. He could only watch Lucy as she entered and left the school, and pay boyish and bashful attentions to her on her

way home, while Orville's companionship with her was unrestricted. This was Grant's real incentive to the encounter which resulted in the defeat and humiliation of his adversary.

Grant had never been in the Brinton mansion but once, and that was a few days before his battle with Orville, when he rode Lucy's horse home after he had been re-shod in his father's shop. He rode slowly, and took a roundabout way to the mansion, for it almost seemed that Lucy was sitting in front of him, and he was happy in the fancy. He did not doubt that she was an angel, and might have floated like a gossamer before him, with but a feather's additional weight upon the horse.

She had always treated his motherless sister Martha, two or three years younger than himself, so tenderly—pinning the shawl around her shoulders as she left the school-room, tying the strings of her apron, adjusting a knot or a bow here and there, and kissing her, when she remembered that she had no mother to look after these tidy little details—that Grant's stout young heart bent in silent adoration before her. Nor could he help but show it. Nearer to Lucy or more intimate, he had never dared to hope for, but he found a pleasure in protecting her brothers, and through them sending to her, as the gift of Martha, the earliest Spring flowers gathered from the hills, and in the Autumn great bunches of black haws and other luxuries of the forest. In thanking Martha, Lucy discovered





the source of these offerings ; but, little more than child as she was, she appreciated the delicacy of the giver, and repaid him by waiting for his stout arm when there was an icy path to cross in leaving the school-house, with thanks for his assistance, which included flowers and fruits, and all, and a smile brighter to him than the sunlight itself.

Before Grant reached the stable with Billy, Lucy and Milton had left the lawn, from which his approach was observed, and intercepted him. Lucy's excuse was—for she thought it necessary to have one—that she was anxious to see “how Billy's new shoes fitted.” This somewhat flimsy explanation seemed to be entirely satisfactory, although a careful observer might have noted that she so far forgot her errand that she did not even once glance at Billy's feet.

Milton offered no apology, but without warning or ceremony seized Grant by the leg and attempted to drag him from the horse. He finally dismounted with an awkward protest, when the boy led Billy to the stable yard, leaving him and Lucy together in the lane.

Grant was embarrassed as he turned and found himself looking into Lucy's eyes. But he saw so much gentleness there, so many unspoken words of kindness, that he had brushed but few imaginary hairs from the working blouse which he had slipped on after school hours, before he was prepared to say :

"That is your horse, I believe, Miss Lucy?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply; "papa gave him to me three or four years ago."

"A finely gaited animal," ventured Grant; "his pace is as easy as a rocking-chair."

"Not quite," was Lucy's laughing reply; "his trot is far from being easy; but Billy is a kind horse, and I like him, and he is fond of me."

"I don't see how he can help it!" Grant did not intend to say this; but it was in his heart, and the next moment on his tongue. He felt the hair rise under his straw hat as he turned and gazed down the lane, afraid to look into Lucy's face. But nothing more dreadful would have been seen there than a modest blush, which melted into the music of a merry laugh, and ended with "Here comes brother!"

This was a relief to Grant. The boy insisted that he should go to the house and "see grandmother and mother." He knew they wanted to see him, for he had often spoken of him to both of them. This was gratuitous; but he was anxious to introduce his big friend to his mother, and did not know that he would ever have another opportunity. Grant looked at his working clothes and was about to decline, when Lucy looked up into his face and said, "Won't you, just for a moment?" and without a word he bowed and followed her toward the house.

It was fortunate for Grant that both mother and

grandmother were on the front veranda as he ascended the steps. This gave the visit less the appearance of an intrusion.

The introduction was not very formal, as Milton interlarded Lucy's efforts in that direction with a noisy rehearsal of Grant's good qualities. He was very kindly received, however, and was induced by Mrs. Brinton to step into the family parlor and be helped to a slice of cake and glass of blackberry wine.

The younger brother, Alfred, had now come in from the lawn, and was scarcely less voluble than the other in sounding the praises of Grant, who, he declared, was "strong enough to lift a house." Grant modestly protested against such extravagant commendation ; but the mother smiled as she said, "Boys will talk," and the grandmother, who had entered the room with Lucy, and carefully scanned the young man both through and above her spectacles, was not quite sure that the boy had very greatly overestimated Grant's strength.

Grant's conduct was modest, decorous and manly; but had he been on the verge of starvation a quarter of an hour before, he could have eaten nothing then ; and after swallowing a part of a glass of wine, he politely thanked Mrs. Brinton and took his leave. The boys followed him to the gate, and he walked home with a soul entranced with a sweeter melody than he had ever heard before.

After Grant left the house grandmother and Mrs.



Brinton resumed their seats on the veranda, and Lucy stood looking down the lawn. It may be that she was watching her brothers at their sports ; yet it is possible that her eyes occasionally caught a sturdier figure with a light step moving down the lane.

"Our boys seem to think a great deal of Grant—I believe that is his name," said Mrs. Brinton.

"Yes," replied the grandmother, who knew something of the value of strong arms and brave hearts ; "yes, that is his name. He is certainly a very handsome and intelligent young man, and, judging from his face, I should say he is as brave and modest as he is muscular and self-reliant. I like such boys. They are not ashamed to work or afraid to do right, and always make good men."

If there was anything else said about Grant, Lucy did not hear it, for she had suddenly glided down the steps to meet Mrs. Blakeley, her music teacher, who usually came an hour earlier, for it was then almost five o'clock. She lingered around the door until her mother and Mrs. Blakeley entered the house ; then throwing her arms around her grandmother's neck, she kissed her without a word, and hastily followed her teacher.

For a moment the grandmother gazed thoughtfully at the door through which Lucy had vanished. She then rose and looked down the lane. Grant, too, had disappeared.

### CHAPTER III.

*The Brintons and the Boutons.—Sudden Appearance of  
Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs.*



QUIETLY the months came and went with the little group in Brinton with whom the reader has been made acquainted, and we will now resume the thread of our story, from which we were almost unconsciously diverted. Yet it was natural enough, perhaps, for in thoughtlessly following the footsteps of youth, we are as likely to go backward as forward.

In assisting his father before and after school hours, Grant Bouton had become a very good blacksmith. In steeling and tempering edge tools and other delicate work, he was somewhat less skillful than his father, but in shoeing horses, welding and re-setting wagon tires, repairing broken chains and the like, Grant had but little to learn to meet the necessities of a country village.

Under the instruction of Doctor Bement, Orville was studying medicine at intervals, and preparing for an early and easy graduation at some medical school ; but as he lacked industry, and thought less

of diseased livers than of shot-guns and fast horses, his progress was not very encouraging.

Lucy, who, as her grandmother told her, was "almost a woman," had become somewhat more staid in her demeanor. She was budding into a charming womanhood, as lovely in character as in form and feature. The next winter was to be her last at school, an arrangement having been made with Mrs. Blakeley to give her such additional instruction at home as she seemed to require.

Orville continued to be a frequent visitor at the Brinton mansion, and although Lucy was more rarely seen in public with him than formerly, she received his attentions kindly, and treated him with the guileless freedom of long and friendly association.

Grant's first visit to the mansion had been his last. Lucy's sixteenth birth-day, the preceding May, had been celebrated by a gathering in the evening of a small party of her young friends. Grant was not invited, of course. He did not expect to be, for the family of the blacksmith did not belong to the little circle in which the Brintons moved. Yet, had he been invited, his appearance would have been consistent with the occasion, for he had a new and genteel suit of black, which he had for the first time worn to church the Sunday before. Early in the morning he had gone up the creek and gathered a small bouquet of delicate wild flowers, which he placed in water and secreted until school was dis-

missed in the afternoon. Had Lucy been at school that day, he would have asked his sister to make the present as an offering of her own ; but she was not, and he sent the flowers to her by Milton as a birthday remembrance from Martha. But Lucy knew the source, and what would Grant not have given to see her kiss, as she did, the fragrant blossoms, and then carefully place them in a vase in her own room.

Thenceforth Grant was more than ever timid in his attentions to Lucy. She lacked but a step or two of being a woman, while he was almost a man. He began to think it rude to watch for her as she left the school-room. He had loved her as a child because he could not do otherwise, but he felt that, to worship her as a woman, which his heart prompted, would be a cruelty to himself, as well as a humiliation to her.

Thus passed the winter, and with the Spring came the unexpected death of old John Bouton. He died of pneumonia, or lung fever, after an illness of but three days. It was a hard blow to Grant, and poor Martha, who had nestled closely to her father's heart after the death of her mother, seven or eight years before, sank under it like a frosted flower.

On the day of the funeral many came to the humble home of the dead blacksmith; and followed his remains to the grave, for he was an honest, upright man, and had earned the respect of all with whom he had been brought in business or social

contact. Even Mr. Brinton came, with his wife and daughter, and Dr. Bement, who had closed the eyes of the old man in death, thought he could not do less than attend the funeral.

As they entered the little parlor, on a table in the center of which had been placed the coffin, Martha was sobbing in the arms of the old housekeeper, and Grant sat pale and tearless beside the body. He rose and politely pointed to seats. As he did so he recognized the face of Lucy. It was full of sympathy, and there were tears in her eyes. Turning toward his sister, in a trembling voice he said, almost imploringly: "Speak to her, Miss Lucy! Say something to comfort her. I cannot!" and then sank slowly back into his seat.

Lucy softly approached and put her arms around Martha's neck. Over a grief so desolating all hearts were humbled, and the voice of humanity alone was heard. The poor girl looked up through her tears, and "Ah, Lucy!" was all she could say, as she raised her arms and hid her sweet, sad face on the bosom of her school-room friend. Doctor Bement and Mr. Brinton both looked out of the window, and Mrs. Brinton pulled her vail down over her face.

As the party withdrew from the room, Lucy tenderly kissed the stricken girl, and held her to her heart, as if to share the heavy burden of her grief. Approaching the door, she saw Grant leaning upon the table, his face buried in his hands. She hesitated

a moment, and then laid her soft hand upon his shoulder. He looked up and sadly rose to his feet. Neither spoke. Lucy felt that she ought to say something, but did not know where to begin, and therefore did not begin at all. She finally extended her hand, looking Grant bravely and calmly in the face. A volume of words could not have so strengthened him. He took the little hand in his broad palm, and bending over it, pressed the fingers to his lips. The hand was gently withdrawn, and Lucy hurried from the room.

The old blacksmith left but little to his children beside the shop and a comfortable home. But these were enough for Grant. Martha was in her sixteenth year, and large enough and sufficiently skilled to attend to the duties of housekeeping without assistance, and Grant was almost master of his trade.

In due time the shop was re-opened, and Grant managed to retain a fair share of its old patronage. He did not venture upon the employment of a journeyman; but he really required the assistance of some one as a striker and in the management of heavy work, and in a short time found the necessary help in an unexpected manner.

One evening, about a month after the death of his father, as Grant was engaged in front of his shop in removing the bark and sharp corners from a new white oak anvil block—for the old block was pretty well worn, as well as a little too low for him

—a young man, with a carpet-bag thrown carelessly over his shoulder from the end of a stout hickory stick, came sauntering up the Kenyonville road. He was dressed in a plain business suit, somewhat worn, but fitting his person neatly, and a pair of boots plainly too light in structure and material for a long journey on foot. On his head, tipped jauntily to one side, was a soft felt hat, behind the band of which were stuck three or four varieties of wild flowers. He was perhaps two or three inches less than six feet in height, and straight, agile and muscular. His features were regular, and what women would call handsome. His upper lip was fringed with a light mustache of soft, black hair, and his cheeks showed that they had not long known the razor. His eyes, like his hair, were dark, but there was something about them more striking than their color. They sparkled with intelligence and good humor; and as he turned from the road on observing Grant at his work, and abruptly reached him by jumping over a bob-sled instead of stepping a few feet around it, the young blacksmith smiled as he threw the carpet-bag from his shoulder and dropped down upon a wagon-tongue immediately in front of him.

“Good evening!” said Grant, politely, sticking the axe into the block, and looking inquiringly into the face of his visitor.

“Good evening,” returned the stranger. “Pleasant road between here and Kenyonville. A little

dusty in places, but winding through a charming valley all the way. The farmers are busy everywhere, and the cattle have left their dry winter fodder and taken to the green hills. Flowers of an almost endless variety are abundant on every side, and the squirrels are out chattering and bathing themselves in the sunshine. I am fond of flowers, and in strolling among them and watching the birds and squirrels, have been all day in footing it from Kenyonville, which cannot be more than twelve or fifteen miles from here."

"Only eight," interrupted Grant, amused at the volubility of the stranger, and glancing with a smile at the flowers in his hat.

"Only eight miles!" echoed the stranger, with a whistle. "Well, I really have been taking it leisurely!" Noting the direction of Grant's eyes, he recollected the flowers in his hat, and smiled as he removed it from his head, and picked the wilting blossoms one by one from the band. "I suppose I must have placed them there," he said, replacing the hat, "but scarcely know when or why."

Rising, he excused himself for detaining Grant, in his work, and inquired the way to a public house. Grant pointed at an inn a few yards up the street, and then good-naturedly explained that there had been no interruption, as he had about finished work for the day.

"I am glad of it," said the young man, with a genial, careless laugh, as he threw the carpet-bag



lightly over his shoulder ; "but if I have taken your time, it was not altogether my fault. As I was strolling along the road, a fairy seemed to bend over from one of the flowers in my hat, and in a soft whisper tell me on entering Brinton to inquire the way to a public house of a good-looking young giant whom I would discover at the close of the day stripping the bark from a section of an oak tree selected and sawed for a butcher's block."

"Did the fairy mention that it would be necessary for you to jump over a bob-sled in reaching the good-looking young giant?" inquired Grant, catching the humor of the stranger.

"No," returned the latter ; "I do not recollect that the word bob-sled was mentioned, but there can be no doubt about the butcher's block."

"Then you have not reached the end of your journey," replied Grant, "for this block has been prepared for an anvil, not for a cleaver."

The young man turned and re-examined the block with a quizzical look. "The fairy was wrong, I observe ; but she also told me that if I would remain long enough, I would behold one of the sweetest of her sisters ; and there she is," he continued, pointing to the open door of the cottage, in which Martha had just appeared to call Grant to supper.

"You are right," said Grant, now thoroughly amused ; "she is my sister as well as the fairy's."

We live alone there, and she cares for the house while I stand sentry at the forge."

"Vulcan and Diana!" exclaimed the strange visitor. "Then the whisper was from the lips of Zephyr herself. Now show me the armor of Achilles, for I have come to claim and wear it!"

"If your destination be Troy," replied Grant, promptly, referring to a little village not many miles distant, "you should have taken the tow-path with your myrmidons instead of the Miami valley."

A merry laugh from the stranger greeted this apt retort, as he said:

"Well, I will not detain you from your supper, since it is possible that I have kept you from your work; but I should like to know, at parting, whether the swarthy assistants of the young Vulcan of Brinton have six eyes each in their heads, or only one."

"More marvelous still," replied Grant; "they have neither eyes nor heads. I am my own helper. But I sometimes have work—and it is not the making of armor, either—that can better be done with four hands than with two, and am looking for a stout lad to do the striking and assist generally around the shop."

"And here he is!" exclaimed the stranger, throwing up both hands in a dramatic manner, and allowing the carpet-bag to fall to the ground.

"You?" inquired Grant, in astonishment.

"And why not?" was the answer.

"Why not?" repeated Grant; "because it strikes me that you are a little too old for the business, and seem to have been brought up for something different."

"All a mistake," replied the young man. "I am but little older than yourself, and was evidently designed for a blacksmith, since I have not been a remarkable success at anything else."

"But the wages," said Grant; "I can afford to pay little more than a bare living for the services I require."

"No matter," was the reply. "In the language of the advertisement of the poor but energetic clerk, permit me to observe that salary is less an object than steady employment."

Grant was puzzled. At length he said: "Well, if you happen to be of the same mind to-morrow morning, drop around, and we will talk the matter over. But you have not mentioned your name."

"My name?" returned the other with a strange twinkle in his eye. "O yes! my name is a neat, compact little affair. It is Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs. That is the name which will probably be subscribed to my deeds, should I ever have any realty to transfer, and inscribed under the *hic jacet* of my tombstone should my bones meet with sepulture in a Christian land. But plain Mark will answer for ordinary intercourse — Mark with a final *k*; it sounds crisp and business like."

"Well, then, Mr. Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs,"

rejoined Grant, "or, since you prefer it, plain Mark with a final *k*, my name is Grant Bouton. You will find me in or about the shop quite as early to-morrow morning as you will probably care to see me. Good evening!" And Grant turned and walked toward the cottage, while Mark shouldered his carpet-bag and started whistling up the street to the nearest inn.

Martha was not a very inquisitive girl; but when Grant entered the house it was quite natural that she should make some inquiry concerning the "pleasant looking young man" with whom he had been conversing; and Grant, ever seeking for something to cheer and divert her, made happy their humble meal by repeating the conversation as nearly as he was able to recall it. Nor did he forget to tell her that the young stranger, observing her at the door, had declared her to be the sister of a fairy, and in such a way that no offense could be construed.

That brought a little color to Martha's cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with something of their former brightness as she remarked, in a tone intended to express an indignation which she plainly could not feel, that "he must be a very bold, impudent young man." Grant thought him neither, and expressed the opinion that he was simply an intelligent, kind-hearted, careless young wanderer, who would in time outgrow his frivolity. When he came to the stranger's proposal to become his assistant in the shop, Martha's eyes opened widely as she said:

"Do you really intend to employ him, Grant?"


"Why not?" inquired the brother. "I require the assistance of some one, and he seems to be content to accept my terms. Besides, he is full of life and good humor, and would be pleasant company for both of us."

Martha, who had really no idea of objecting, meekly deferred to the judgment of her brother; and Grant, who left the young man with a hope that he might not return in the morning, had, in carelessly favoring the project for the diversion of his sister, convinced himself that the unexpected applicant was right when he dropped the carpet-bag from his shoulder and declared that he was just the person for the place. Therefore, when Mark made his appearance at the shop in the morning, Grant greeted him with gratifying cordiality. In less than ten minutes satisfactory arrangements were made, and Mark's carpet-bag was deposited in a pleasant little room in the Bouton cottage.

He had evidently learned something of the late history of the young blacksmith and his sister, during his brief stay at the inn, for when Grant led the way to the cottage and presented him to Martha, he treated her so considerately, and in a few minutes said so many kind, genial and pleasant things as he bustled in and out of his room, that when he left for the shop with Grant she looked out of the door through which he had passed, and thought she had known him for a long time.

Entering the shop, Mark removed his coat, tied a large leathern apron around him, and then seizing a sledge-hammer, raised it above his head, and implored Grant to place a huge mass of iron upon the anvil, that he might pulverize it at a single blow. More legitimate work was soon found for the sledge-hammer, however, and before night Mark had received his first lessons both at the bellows and the anvil.

Mark was strangely cheerful and volatile, and at the supper table amused Martha by detailing in a humorous manner his first essays with the hammer and bellows, and declaring, in conclusion, that he considered himself, at the end of a single day's work, an accomplished worker in iron, capable of taking full charge either of a machine shop or foundry. He admitted that Grant was a skillful workman, which was the result of years of toil and careful instruction, while he had brought to the business a natural aptitude or genius, which he was satisfied would soon give him a world-wide reputation as a artist in iron. And then he illustrated the difference between genius and educated muscular skill. One was brilliant, progressive and godlike; the other slow, plodding and earthy. Grant's blows, for example, were methodical, accurate and painfully mechanical, while his were eccentric, vigorous and startling. During the afternoon he had knocked the tongs out of Grant's hand, and with a twenty-pound sledge had beaten the weld of a wag-



on-tire as thin as a wafer before he could be stopped. But there was a rich compensation in these occurrences, however annoying at the time. They resulted in the discovery—new to him if not to Grant—that, to render accurate as well as effective the blow of a twenty-pound sledge wielded by both hands, the orbit described by the hammer should not be strictly elliptical, as he had supposed, but should leave the anvil on the arc of a circle, and return to it by the chord.

After supper Mark proffered to do any one of three things: he would either wash the dishes, milk the cow, or split the fire-wood for the next day. Martha declined his services in the kitchen, and Grant informed him that, as the cow was not partial to strangers, he would do the milking himself, but would allow him to use the axe, if he insisted upon the exercise to give him an appetite for breakfast.

Later in the evening, while they were sitting in their little parlor, Mark slipped into his room, and in a few minutes returned with the joints of a small flute, carefully packed away in a case. He put them together, and then, turning to Martha, said:

"I am not much of a musician, but such as I have will I give unto thee. What shall I torture you with?"

"Anything you please, Mr. Briggs," replied Martha. "I am very fond of the flute. Its notes are as mellow as the voices of birds."

"You are right," returned Mark; "but no more 'Mr. Briggs,' I beg of you. Call me Mark; it sounds more neighborly."

"Yes, Martha, call him Mark," said Grant, "for you can never hope to pronounce his name in full as he gave it to me."

"Well, then, Mark," ventured Martha, "can you favor us with 'The Last Rose of Summer'?"

"I can do myself the favor of attempting to comply with your request," replied Mark, gallantly; and without further persuasion, he placed the flute to his lips, and gave the air with a tenderness she had never heard before. Finding that he was a master of the instrument, he was not allowed to put it aside, until he had given his little audience a thorough taste of his quality.

And thus the first evening they spent together wore pleasantly away, and so did the evenings in the blacksmith's cottage for many a month to come.

After Mark had retired, Martha turned to Grant with a look of amazement, and asked:

"Who is this young man who has dropped in upon us so strangely?"

"What do you think of him?" inquired Grant.

"I scarcely know *what* to think of him," replied Martha. "He is intelligent and entertaining, and certainly possesses accomplishments not usually found in the backwoods. But where is he from?"

"He did not inform me," answered Grant, "and I am not sure that I inquired."



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"Then you knew nothing of him?" persisted Martha.

"Nothing, except that he seems to be curiously apt at almost everything," replied Grant, "and his name is Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs."

## CHAPTER IV.

*The New West.—Sudden Disappearance of Mark.—  
The Boutons Follow.*



As the Summer wore on, Mark became a valuable assistant to the young blacksmith, not more because of his industry and intelligence than of his ceaseless buoyancy of spirits. Ripples of song welled over to the thesis of his ringing hammer, and the iron was often burned in the forge while Grant was listening to his quaint quotations, as he swung with a strong arm the handle of the bellows.

He had become the light and life of the Bouton cottage, and Grant's great, simple heart went out to him as he saw how much he had done, and was daily doing, to lift the pall of sorrow from their humble home. When at home he played, sang, read from the few books in the family library, assisted Martha, sometimes, it seemed, with intentional awkwardness, and kept either a continual smile or blush upon her face; for when he was present she had no time to think of the past. Grant saw the kind purpose of this levity, or thought he did, and

was inclined to the belief that the fairy that had whispered in the ear of Mark to inquire of him the way to a public house, was something more than a mere creature of the fancy.

Once or twice Grant had sought to gather from Mark something of his past life ; but inquiries in that direction had been evaded, or answered with such manifest extravagance, that the attempt to ascertain even the place of his birth was finally abandoned.

His carpet-bag, which evidently contained but little after the removal of a modest assortment of clothing, was always kept locked. One Sunday, through the partly-open door of his room, which Martha was passing, she saw him kiss and return to his satchel a picture upon which he had evidently been gazing. She had known Mark but four or five months, but was compelled to admit to herself that she was a little—just a very little—annoyed at what she had seen. She was not jealous ; of that she was quite satisfied, for she remembered that Mark was almost a stranger to her ; but she thought of the picture very often, nevertheless, and knew it to be of a woman, since he had kissed it so tenderly ; and wondered whether she was old or young, and if her hair and eyes were light, or dark, like her own.

For a week or more thereafter, Martha frequently addressed Mark as “ Mr. Briggs.” Utterly unable to account for these unexpected displays of dignity

or reserve, Mark usually brought a smile to her face by in turn referring to her, with comical austerity, as "Miss Bouton."

One evening, not long after, a question was raised concerning the exact text of a familiar passage of Scripture. The family Bible was searched, but it could not readily be found. "Wait a moment, and I will confound you both," said Mark, "for I believe the verse is marked in my little Bible."

He proceeded to his room, and returning in a few minutes, opened to the passage in question and read it aloud.

"You see I was right," he exclaimed triumphantly. "There it is, marked on the margin." And he passed the open volume to Martha.

She read the verse precisely as Mark had quoted it, and then began carelessly to turn the leaves. Mark concluded his discussion with Grant just in time to observe her open the book at one of the front fly-leaves on which something was written. Standing near, in a moment his hand was laid upon the leaf, and, apologizing to Martha, he begged permission to read a chapter from Job, which he declared to be a poem from beginning to end.

If Grant did not notice, Martha certainly marked the hasty and seemingly rude manner in which the volume had been taken from her hand; but there was not even a feeling of reproach in her heart, for beneath the lines which Mark had covered with his hand she had seen the name of "Mother."

The next day business called Grant to Kenyonville, and as he did not return until evening, Mark and Martha sat down to dinner alone. Mark was unusually entertaining, and Martha soon found an opportunity to intimate that she had read a portion of the writing on the fly-leaf of his Bible, which he had so hastily sought to conceal the day before. After a little cross-firing, however, Martha admitted that she recalled nothing but the word "Mother" at the end of the inscription. This was a relief to Mark, and he did not deny that the book was a present from his mother.

"You must esteem it almost as highly as the picture of your mother—that is, if you *have* her picture," said Martha, looking down from the table as if she had dropped something and it had rolled out into the kitchen.

"Yes, I have a picture of my mother," replied Mark, "and it comprises the sum total of my portrait gallery."

"I should very much like to see it," returned Martha.

"I will show it to you some time," said Mark.

"Why not now?" urged Martha. "I am curious to see if you resemble her."

"Very well," was the reply; and Mark left the table, and in a few minutes returned and placed in her hand the daguerreotype of a fine-looking middle-aged lady, whose features bore a striking resemblance to his own.

"This is a good, kind, motherly face !" exclaimed Martha, and she kissed it as she returned the picture to Mark.

"Now that you have seen the picture," said Mark, with a great deal more seriousness than Martha had ever marked in his face before, "I want you to promise that, should you ever observe a picture anywhere that seems to be of my mother, you will say to no one beside myself where you saw this. Do you promise?"

"Why, yes, since you desire it," replied Martha, wondering at the strange request. Mark returned the picture to his sachel, and after that Martha did not address him as "Mr. Briggs," for she deemed it highly proper in a young man to kiss the portrait of his mother at all times, and especially when alone in his own room, with the door either closed or slightly ajar.

After the death of his father, Grant's school days, of course, were ended, and Martha's household duties kept her employed at home ; but they had both reached the limits of a respectable common school education, and relied upon self-instruction for further advancement.

About this time Mark came to the village, Orville Bement, being in his twentieth year, was preparing for a lengthy visit to Philadelphia, where he was to attend a course of medical lectures, and a few months after that took his departure, with such

flourish as accorded with the occurrence in the Bement family of an event of so much importance.

Mark had learned all about the Brinton and Bement families from Martha ; of the probable marriage of Lucy Brinton and Orville after the latter had completed his medical studies ; of her own and Grant's great admiration of Lucy, who seemed to have inherited little of the family pride which even in the small town of Brinton had reared social barriers between neighbors.

Although Mark had frequently seen Orville, he spoke to him but once before his departure to Philadelphia, and the interview then was anything rather than agreeable. One day, in front of a house adjoining the office of Dr. Bement, Mark was driving into a hitching-post a staple and ring repaired at the shop. With his hands idly behind him, Orville walked leisurely up, and for a moment stood watching Mark at his labor. The latter, whose face was somewhat begrimed with the soot of the forge, looked up and politely bowed. Not a word or a motion was offered in answer. Mark felt a little nettled, as he turned and bluntly opened the conversation with :

"I understand you are about to start East for the purpose of completing your medical studies?"

"Yes," returned Orville, with a lofty and insulting air ; "that is, if I am fortunate enough to obtain your consent."

Mark straightened himself up, and regarding the

other with a look more of pity than anything else, replied :

" You have it, with all my heart ; and, as I may not see you again before your departure, take with you, also, my permission to conclude your education in the penitentiary, where I doubt not you will finally graduate."

" You are a scrub !" growled Orville.

" You are a liar !" was the calm reply.

Orville did not lack courage ; but there was something in Mark's eye that he did not like, and without another word he turned and walked into the office, while Mark with a quiet laugh of derision resumed his work.

Lucy was no longer at school, and was completing her education at home under the instruction of Mrs. Blakeley. Grant saw her occasionally, but spoke to her but two or three times during the Summer. As Autumn came, with its yellow leaves and gusty winds, Grant thought of the wild fruits he had gathered from the forests and sent to Lucy every year, almost since they were children. But he doubted the propriety of longer continuing the custom, for both were almost grown, and he was fearful that she might regard any such boyish attention then as frivolous, if not impertinent. And the wild plums ripened and fell to the ground, and the black haws began to wither on the stem.

But it seems that Grant was not the only one who thought of his neglected Autumn offerings ;



and one morning, after a biting frost, and the walnut leaves were covering the lawn, Lucy asked her brother Milton, as he was starting for school, if Martha or Grant Bouton had not given him something for her during the preceding week which he had forgotten to deliver. He could think of nothing; yet, as he was not quite certain, after school was dismissed in the afternoon he called at the shop and, boy-like, repeated to Grant precisely what Lucy had said to him in the morning.

The knowledge had been accidentally imparted; but it gratified Grant beyond measure to learn that his simple Autumn gifts had been missed, and he invited the boy to call at the shop after school the next day; and when he came, Grant sent home to Lucy, as a present from Martha, a sack of shell-bark hickory and hazel nuts, which he had gathered from wood and thicket early in the morning.

Mr. Brinton was at home when the boy came into the sitting-room and unceremoniously threw the heavy sack into Lucy's lap, with, "A nice present for you, sis, from Martha Bouton. Grant told me to give it to you with the compliments of his sister; and Martha is his sister, you know; and a part of the nuts are mine for bringing them home; and my back is almost broke; and I didn't ask any one to help me; and won't we have a jolly time cracking 'em, for they're soft shells, and the best nuts in the whole world!"

Lucy's cheeks burned a little as Mr. Brinton

removed the sack from her lap, and opening it, said :

"Hickory and hazel nuts ! This *is* a nice present, Lucy ! Martha is a very modest and comely girl, and there is not a more quiet or industrious young man in the village than her brother. You must think of something to send the girl in return."

But Lucy was confused and could think of nothing.

"Ah ! I have it !" continued Mr. Brinton, after a pause. He took a card from his pocket and penciling upon it "Miss Martha Bouton, with the compliments of Miss Lucy Brinton," said : "Here, Milton; hand this card to John, and tell him to tack it on the end of a barrel of nice winter apples, and leave it at Bouton's blacksmith shop some time tomorrow."

Mrs. Brinton and grandmother both thought the present would be very appropriate and acceptable. Lucy was very near and dear to her father, and he was proud to see her thus loved and remembered by her old school-mates, however humble; and as he was gratified to think that he had done a befitting thing in sending a barrel of apples to the young blacksmith's sister, he petted his complacency still further by adding :

"I have had the most of my work done at Grimsey's for the past year or two, but think I will send it hereafter to young Bouton. He is making

an earnest, manly struggle, and should be encouraged."

The vote was also unanimous on this proposition, although Lucy failed to answer.

"But I think Grant made a mistake in the selection of an assistant," continued Mr. Brinton. "The fellow seems to care for no one. He whistles along the streets, and marches to his own music like a lunatic. He treats me with distasteful familiarity, and in an argument with Professor Abbott, the other day, he absolutely laughed in his face, and advised him to attend a term of the district school. He will drive business away from the shop, and Grant should make a change."

And then all of them had something to say of Mark. He had stared at Lucy on going in and out of church; had proffered to carry a small parcel home for Mrs. Brinton; and only the day before had addressed the old lady, on passing, as "granny."

"And I know him," said Milton. "He is full of fun, and always laughing. He plays the flute better than anybody, for I have heard him, and talks just like a schoolmaster or preacher."

That settled Mark's character and standing in the Brinton mansion, for if he could play the flute and talk like a schoolmaster, his eccentricities might reasonably be overlooked.

The winter following was one of unusual severity in the Miami Valley, and a late and capricious Spring spoke of short crops and a comparatively

fruitless harvest. The farmers were despondent, and trade languished in the villages and supply stations all through the valley.

Almost every branch of business was affected in Brinton, and what added to the disquiet was the preparation which many a farmer or farmer's son in the neighborhood was making for a journey still farther westward, beyond the Missouri, beyond the shadeless sands of the Platte, beyond the Rocky range, beyond the almost trackless wastes of the Great Basin, beyond the verdureless desert, beyond the frozen and pine-clad crests of the Sierra Nevadas, even to California, the diademed queen of the West, the golden glitter of whose streams mounted heavenward and hung like an aurora borealis in the sunset skies, an invitation and challenge to the faith and courage of the East.

The snow was still on the ground in patches, when one morning, early in April, after more than a week of idleness, during which time but little work had been done in the shop, Mark brought his carpet-bag into the parlor after breakfast, and dropping it upon a chair, turned to Grant and Martha, and holding out a hand to each, said, with an emotion which he vainly endeavored to conceal :

"Good-bye ! I did not expect to remain with you a week when I came ; but you have made your little home so pleasant, that almost a year has passed unnoticed."

"Why, where are you going, Mark?" inquired Grant, in amazement.

"Going?" repeated Mark, as he pressed the hands of both; "going where the skies are full of promise, and the mountains look down upon the western seas."

"But this is unexpected," urged Grant. "You can certainly wait a day or two."

"Not an hour!" replied Mark; "not a minute! I have nerved myself for two days for this parting, and dare not trust it to the chances of to-morrow. But we are not saying farewell forever, Grant. We shall all meet again before many years, and then—"

Before he could finish the sentence, Martha, whose eyes had been fixed upon his face with a bewildered stare, suddenly relinquished his hand, and dropping into a chair, covered her face with her hands.

The young men looked at each other for a moment, as if to find an answer to some silent question, and then Grant turned toward the window and bowed his head.

Mark softly approached Martha, and bending over, raised her pale face and tenderly kissed it as he said: "I have left something for you on my table." Then, without another word, he grasped his sachel and hurriedly left the house.

Grant and Martha both stepped to the door, and through their tears saw Mark walking rapidly up





the street with his sachel over his shoulder, just as he had entered the village almost a year before.

"We shall miss him, Martha," said Grant, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

Martha made no reply, but bravely wiped her eyes with her apron and left the room. In a moment she returned with Mark's Bible in her hand. She found it lying open upon the table. The fly-leaf which Martha had once seen had been carefully removed, and on the blank page following was penciled this note :

*"Dear Martha :—I leave my heart with this little volume. Keep it and yourself for me, and I will some day return and ask for both. MARK."*

"What does this mean, Martha?" inquired Grant, after reading the lines two or three times.

"I am sure I do not know, Grant," she replied, reaching for the book. "He never said a word to me that sounded like this." And the color came to her cheek as she added : "But I will keep the book for him, for it is the gift of his mother."

"And is that all you will keep for him?" inquired Grant, looking curiously into her face and patting her soft cheek.

"That is all I can think of now," replied Martha, archly, gliding from the room and taking the little volume with her.

Grant was right. They both missed Mark very



much. Business was dull, and the outlook was cheerless for the young blacksmith. Several from the neighborhood had already started for the Pacific Coast, and many more were preparing for the journey, and by the middle of April Grant wondered that he had not thought of going himself. But how was he to go? He had but little beside the house and shop, and these were scarcely salable. And, then, what would become of Martha?

It is strange, but in less than a week an answer to these questions came, and a broad, clear road across the continent seemed to be opened to him. He could not give title to the realty left by his father, for he was still a minor, and the estate had never been submitted to probate; but he found a blacksmith in Kenyonville who was willing to take the risk to the extent of making a part payment, with the written agreement that the remainder of the purchase-money was to be paid upon the execution of a proper deed after Grant had reached his majority.

After the death of the old blacksmith, more than a year before, Grant had received a letter from his father's only sister, Sophia, inviting Martha to her home as one of her own children. She was the wife of Dr. Elkins, of Buffalo, New York, a physician in good practice, with a family of three children, one of them a girl of about the age of Martha. The kind offer had been renewed by both uncle and aunt, and the children added their

entreaties so earnestly that Grant concluded to accept it. It was therefore arranged that Martha should start for her new home in Buffalo about the last of April, at which time Grant expected to be able to bid good-bye to Brinton, perhaps forever.

It was soon known in the village that Grant was about to part with his shop and turn his face westward. To no one did the intelligence bring so sharp a pang as to Lucy Brinton. She scarcely knew why, but her eyes filled with tears as she heard it. She had never dreamed of Grant leaving Brinton. She tried to think it unkind of him to leave his sister, who would be without protection, and finally concluded that he should be arrested before his departure, on the ground that he had lost his reason. Of course, she felt no especial interest in Grant. This she very stoutly asserted to herself, in the expectation that she would believe it. But she could not understand what right he had to leave Brinton so suddenly, and that, too, perhaps, without saying good-bye to her; and for two or three days she moved around the house paler than usual and more quiet.

Martha had completed her final preparations, and was to start the next morning for Buffalo. This Lucy learned through her brother, and in the afternoon went down to say good-bye. It was the second time she had ever been in the house. She had hoped to meet Grant, but he was at Kenyon-

ville. As Lucy kissed the sister of the humble blacksmith, and said farewell, her emotion almost unnerved Martha, for in that parting she gave expression to a deeper feeling which she vainly sought to stifle, and of which she scarcely knew the meaning.

Grant remained in Brinton about a week after Martha's departure, to dispose of what was left him of the old homestead. The day before the purchaser came to take possession, Grant completed his last job of blacksmithing in the village. He could not leave without saying good-bye to Lucy, and an opportunity was unexpectedly afforded in an order, that morning, to repair a broken hinge of the large lawn gate of the Brinton mansion.

He removed the hinge without observation, and after taking it to the shop and welding it, and straightening the large wrought-iron spikes with which it was fastened to the gate and post, returned in an hour or two to replace it.

He moved leisurely with the work, for he resolved to employ himself with it until he attracted the attention of Lucy, or the boys came home from school for their lunch, when he knew his presence would be announced.

As the hinge had been broken for some time, and the gate was seldom used, it is just possible that it was Lucy who requested John to ask Grant to repair the hinge that morning. And it is also possible that from her chamber window, which

fronted the lawn, she saw Grant when he removed the hinge from the gate, and when he returned with it, as well, for it was not long after that she stepped carelessly out upon the veranda, and in a moment came just as carelessly down the lawn, plucking a flower here and there from among the grass, and apparently observing everything except Grant, although the sound of his hammer could be heard for half a mile around.

At length, after a series of circuitous and zigzag approaches, Lucy stood within a few feet of Grant, and her seeming surprise at finding him before her was a very pretty little piece of acting. Grant, too, was quite as guilty of deception. He saw her when she left the house, and secretly watched almost every step of her coming, the while swinging his hammer lustily, without knowing or caring where it fell.

"Why, is this you, Grant?" exclaimed Lucy, with charmingly feigned surprise.

"Yes, Miss Lucy," replied Grant, throwing the hammer over his shoulder. "I am probably finishing my last job of blacksmithing in Brinton. I shall leave for the West to-morrow afternoon."

He choked a little, and turned and gave the head of a spike three or four vigorous blows with the hammer; and then he heard Lucy say:

"You can scarcely imagine how surprised I was when I heard you were going."

"I was almost as surprised at myself when I con-

cluded to go," said Grant. "But the future was not very bright to me here, and I am anxious to see what fortune may do for me in that wonderful land of which so many golden stories are told."

"Perhaps you are right ; but you may die there, Grant ; or—or—or may never return ;" and Lucy saw a little flower among the clover which it seemed important she should gather at once.

"What should I return for?" inquired Grant, gloomily. "Martha is gone, and the old home has passed into the hands of strangers."

"But you have friends here, Grant," returned Lucy. "You and I have known each other for a long time—ever since we were children, Grant ; and you might go a little out of the way, perhaps, to see me—that is, if you cared enough about me to take the——"

"If I cared enough about you !" repeated Grant. "Why, Miss Lucy, I ——" And here he grasped the ponderous gate, and under pretense of adjusting it to its new fastenings, very nearly tore it from its old.

Lucy was silent. Her head was bowed, and her little foot patted the young grass around her. There was a plain invitation to Grant to complete the sentence he had left unfinished. He observed this, and drew a long and resolute breath.

"As I was about saying, I ——" And here he stooped and picked up the hammer. "Why, Miss Lucy, I have cared for you ever since you were a

child!" and *bang* went the hammer on the head of a spike; "and I love you better than I do God or my own soul!" And, amazed at what he had said, for a full minute he struck wildly at spikes, hinges, gate, posts, and almost everything within reach, in the hope of drowning the echoes of his own voice or silencing the reproaches of hers.

Gradually the blows fell softer and slower, and finally ceased altogether. With great beads of perspiration upon his forehead, Grant then swung the hammer down beside him, and timidly turned to note the effect of his awful announcement. To his astonishment Lucy was standing precisely where he had last seen her. Her hands were clasped, and her eyes seemed to be fixed vacantly upon the ground. His words had struck a chord in her heart which filled the air with music; and she was frightened as the possibility dawned upon her for the first time that she really loved the young blacksmith. A little pride came to her relief as she said, without raising her eyes,

"It is wicked in you to talk so, Grant, and wrong in me to listen."

"I know it!" and Grant was speaking calmly now. "But it is neither your fault nor mine! I love you because I cannot help it. The harm is to me, and, thank God! not to you. It is wrong, perhaps, to say it; but the hopeless tale is told, and hereafter I shall feel better and stronger for it."

"Is the future, then, so hopeless to you? Will

you not return to Brinton some time?" And with the last inquiry tears struggled into Lucy's eyes.

"To see you the wife of Orville Bement?" said Grant, with an unpleasant scowl upon his face.

The roses mounted to her cheeks, and then faded almost to marble as she answered :

"You are cruel, Grant. I was not thinking of Orville Bement !"

Grant would have thrown himself on his knees before her, but as he stepped forward she turned to go. He seized her hand, and for a moment held it, as he earnestly exclaimed : "I did not mean to be cruel. Forgive me !"

"I do forgive you, Grant ; and now farewell !"

"Forever ?"

"It is you who must answer the question." And the next moment, without turning her face toward Grant, Lucy was gone.

Grant watched her until the door of the mansion closed between them. He then stooped, and picking from the grass a flower dropped by Lucy, carefully folded it in a scrap of paper and placed it in his wallet.

A few hasty blows finished the fastenings of the hinge. He looked toward the house, hoping to catch another glimpse of Lucy ; but had her tear-dimmed eyes been as bright as the morning star, he could not have seen them from behind the blinds of her chamber window through which she was watching the departure of the young blacksmith.

"I wish Orville Belmont was ——!" Grant did not complete the savage sentence; but in a tenderer tone he continued: "No, I don't, for perhaps she loves him!" And swinging the hammer over his shoulder, without once looking behind him he returned to the village, and his last work as a blacksmith was done in Brinton.

The day following, after saying good-bye to a few of his friends, Grant threw a sachel and rifle over his shoulders, and quietly left the village.

In glancing back through years of painful emotions, the strong man who has experienced the event will recall his first departure, perhaps forever, from the village where he was born and reared, as one of the saddest moments of his life. The world beyond is new and strange to him. He is unused to separations, and his heart, however strengthened by the promises of the future, lies prostrate and chilled under the voiceless farewells which go out in the fullness of grief, not alone to loved faces and tearful eyes, but to the trees which have grown with him, the hills which marked the boundaries of his childhood's world, and the birds which so long echoed the music of his young heart. They all seem to be a part of him, and his heart lingers among them until new scenes, new associations and new friendships gradually soften the details of the picture, and it finally fades almost to a dream in the perspective of lengthening years.

Need it be wondered, then, that the stout heart



of Grant Bouton bled through his eyes as he turned to take a last look at the village, and then plunged into a narrow path which in a short distance intersected the main river road ?

## CHAPTER V.

### *Mark Briggs on the Plains—A Bold Dash on Foot for California.*



OUR young friend, Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs, was not in his youth a financier of pronounced ability or promise. He thought more of daisies and dew-drops than of gold and diamonds ; more of the songs of birds and the rustling of autumn leaves than of the clinking of coin.

When he left Brinton he declined all compensation for his months of services, very much to the wonder of Grant, declaring that his wallet was crammed with bank-notes, and that he had money to loan on good collaterals. In reality he had but about fifty dollars, all of which he would have left with Grant rather than accept a single cent for his services.

His purpose was to go to California overland. The route, expense and dangers of the journey were details of the undertaking which he regarded as of little consequence, and were therefore left to the

chances and providences of the future. He walked to Cincinnati, leisurely following the tow-path of the Miami canal. There he purchased a rifle, a pair of leathern saddle-bags and a single blanket, and then, after securing passage to Independence, Missouri, found he had just ten dollars left. After examining his little store, Mark felt that, while he had no money to loan, he had at least a reasonable abundance for his immediate wants.

Arriving at Independence, Mark found himself in the midst of a scene of excitement such as had never before been witnessed in that frontier town, long an outfitting point, not only for Santa Fé traders, but to a considerable extent for the hunters and trappers of the Rocky Mountains and upper Missouri.

Thousands of hardy and adventurous men, from almost every State in the Union, with trains of pack animals and teams of horses, mules and oxen, were encamped for miles in and around the village. Many of the teams had already traveled hundreds of miles, many of them as far as Indiana, Illinois and Ohio. Their owners were, therefore, somewhat inured to camp life, and only awaited the coming of the grass to start upon a journey over a wide and almost trackless waste, the end of which they knew not, but the dangers of which they were prepared to encounter.

Others were making their purchases of cattle, wagons and provisions on the ground, and all the spare stock in western Missouri, much of it young

and unbroken, seemed to have been driven to that attractive market.

All day long, during the month of April, the air throughout that vast camp was rent with the braying of mules, the stampeding of cattle, and the curses of teamsters at the awkward or vicious actions of animals for the first time yoked or harnessed to drudgery and toil.

The strange scene seemed almost like a dream to Mark. A new world suddenly burst upon him, peopled with armed and resolute men, bent upon some enterprise to the success of which both body and soul were pledged. They were going in search of gold, and the thought of hardship, danger, and even death, melted away before the visions of wealth which the imagination pictured at their journey's end.

As Mark looked around upon the careful preparations made by others for a plunge into the wilderness, the question of "What next?" at length forced itself upon him. The answer was simple. He must either turn back, or attempt to make the journey on foot, with such an outfit as his limited means would admit.

"All cannot ride," thought Mark. "If others can walk, I can; and while they are subsisting upon their bread, beans and bacon, it will be hard if I fail with my rifle to supply myself with the fat of antelopes and the meat of bears."

Having paid his hotel bill the next day, Mark spent the remainder of his money in the purchase

of additional supplies of ammunition, a few pounds of hard bread, a hatchet, butcher knife and a pound of salt. His last dollar was paid for the half-soling of his boots, the accommodating cordwainer providing him with a pair of old shoes, with which he was able to move slowly and tenderly around until the job was finished.

The weather was still cold, with occasional flurries of snow, and but few trains had started. Mark thought it prudent to remain until the main body moved, and began his camp life by selecting a cool apartment in a shallow cavern, about a mile south-east of the village. He built a low, semi-circular wall of stone around the mouth of the opening, to protect the little he possessed during his hunting excursions among the neighboring hills ; and there he lived for nearly two weeks, satisfactorily subsisting upon roast rabbit and such other small game as came within range of his rifle. The single blanket which he rolled around his shoulders as he dropped to sleep upon a bed of dry leaves, was certainly a light covering for the season, and his slumbers were not always pleasant ; but, in anticipation of the hardships before him, he deemed the experience serviceable, and smiled at the trifling discomfort.

The trains finally in long lines began to move westward, and one morning early in May Mark threw his saddle-bags over one shoulder, and with his rifle upon the other, boldly struck out upon his

journey across the continent. It was a hazardous undertaking. His rifle was to be his sole support, and a reliance for subsistence upon such a source implied the necessity of keeping some distance from the track of travel, which would occasionally bring him in contact with the savage tribes skirting the highway. Some of them were avowedly hostile, while the great westward movement, the destination of which was unknown to them, was regarded by all with suspicion if not with positive alarm.

To add to the dangers of the venture, the cholera had made its appearance among the emigrants, and deaths from the dreadful scourge were occurring daily. In the hope of escaping the pestilence, which had followed them to the very borders of civilization, thousands pushed wildly into the wilderness. But the feet of the destroyer could not be stayed, and it was left behind only by some of the more advanced of the trains. It traveled on the wings of the wind, moving westward with the mighty host, and pitilessly lining the highways with the graves of some of the best and bravest of that courageous army of pioneers; and it only relaxed its grasp after the summit of the Rocky Mountains was reached, and the winds from the west threw around its victims the balm of their unattainted breath.

The first day Mark traveled about thirty miles. He kept the main road, passing a large number of trains. His supper was a gray squirrel which his rifle brought him, and with his single blanket

wrapped around him, he slept soundly under the branches of a tall cottonwood, with the stars looking kindly down upon him through the trembling leaves.

Across the Kansas river and the Blue, through the lands of the half-domesticated Kickapoos, Delawares and other tribes of Indians removed from the valleys of the Ohio, the Wabash, the Miami and the Maumee to reservations beyond the Missouri many years before, Mark steadily journeyed onward. He passed many trains, but hundreds of wagons were still in advance of him, and to readily secure the game required for his subsistence, it was necessary for him to travel a portion of the time a considerable distance from the road. There was little danger, however, of entirely losing it, since, far as the eye could reach, an almost continuous line of dust, rising high in air like the advancing cloud which guided through the wilderness the footsteps of the children of Jacob, marked the course of the moving trains.

Sometimes Mark lighted his camp-fire in the evening in the neighborhood of an encamping train, but quite as often he slept alone on the treeless plain, with wolves and prairie dogs for his companions. He had meat in abundance. He found but little difficulty in bringing down an antelope or buffalo whenever necessity demanded, and not unfrequently, when too long a walk was not involved, would drop in upon some camping party at the close of the day, and make glad every heart by the contribution of an antelope, or the in-

formation where, at no great distance, might be found and packed in the best portions of a buffalo which he had killed that evening at the foot of the low rolling hills skirting the valley. In exchange every store was open to him, but a cup of coffee and a few slices of bread, to vary the monotony of his simple bill of fare, were about all he could be induced to accept.

He knew that the hunters and trappers of the Far West subsisted for months together almost exclusively upon wild meats, and as he had concluded to follow their example, he was not disposed to encourage his appetite in its cravings for luxuries beyond what his rifle was able to procure.

It was not many days before Mark entered the lands of the Arapahoes and Cheyennes—the first of the wild tribes encountered beyond a few straggling bands of Pawnees who occasionally ventured south of the Platte.

Daily newly-made graves became more numerous around the camping places of the numerous thousands. This Mark observed with alarm, as he struck the road at intervals. He knew what these little mounds in the wilderness meant. They told him that the cholera was doing its dreadful work, and that hundreds of brave young hearts were going down by the wayside, the bodies in most instances left in unmarked and shallow graves, a prey to the wolves, as well as to the savages, for the clothes in which they were buried.



Mark was in doubt what to do. If there was danger in throwing himself in contact with the cholera-stricken trains, there was scarcely less peril in traveling miles from the road, with the possibility of an attack of the scourge beyond the reach of assistance. He finally decided, however, to avoid exposure to the contagion as far as possible, and trust to an escape from it altogether.

This resolution carried him still further from the road—sometimes so far, that for two or three days together he completely lost sight of it. His route was rough, and he not unfrequently came to streams, which he was compelled to swim, shoving before him a frail raft bearing his rifle and saddlebags. Along the most of these streams were Indian villages, which Mark soon learned to use as stopping places for the night. He correctly concluded it to be safer to boldly claim the hospitality of the savages than to be discovered by them in the neighborhood of their villages, and soon imposed so far upon the fear which all Indians have of persons of unsound mind—believing them to be some special instrument of Deity—as to demand the best accommodations their wigwams afforded. His wants were supplied with grunts, smiles and looks of wonder, but he was never molested. The respect shown him seemed to increase with the audacity of his demeanor, until he finally refused to accept the hospitality of any one lower in authority than the chief or head warrior of the village.

It was a strange proceeding for him, as night approached, to march into the village of a tribe perhaps unfriendly with the whites, and coolly take possession of the wigwam of the chief, if it could be found; but it never resulted in harsh treatment. In return he played upon his flute, to the great delight of his dusky auditors, and gave them specimens of his skill with the rifle. This was the very acme of romance to Márk, and he was sometimes half disposed to abandon his westward journey, and take up his permanent abode among the savages.

Leaving a village, one morning, after having traveled two or three miles he discovered an Indian child on his trail, and evidently following him. He sat down, and the child timidly approached. In a moment he recognized one of the little girls noticed by him in and around the wigwam of the chief where he had lodged the night before. She was ten or eleven years of age, and quite neatly clad in a jacket of tanned antelope or deer skin, with a skirt of the same material reaching below the knees, and trimmed with feathers of various colors tastefully interwoven in the form of a border. The little feet were covered with moccasins, and her long black hair was gathered behind her ears and bound with a leathern string, the liberated ends floating down against her back like an ebony fan. Under her arm she carried a small brown bear-skin, rolled in which were a few trinkets and three or four pounds of

cured buffalo meat, cut into thin strips and braided before drying.

Mark generally kept a small supply of these dried meat braids, as a precaution against a short allowance of game at any time. The meat is palatable and nutritious, and may be eaten without farther preparation, or readily transformed into a delicious soup in a few minutes, the braids separating and crumbling into small particles on being brought in contact with boiling water.

The little brown maiden presented quite a picturesque appearance as she walked up to Mark, and without a word or sign dropped the bear-skin at his feet, and then knelt beside it with her face bowed to the ground.

Mark rose to his feet with an amazed as well as half-amused look. Had she been a few years older, he might have attributed her presence there to a romantic infatuation. As it was, he came to the conclusion, which subsequent events proved to be correct, that she did not belong to the tribe she had just left, but had been stolen or captured, and was attempting with his assistance to make her escape.

This placed him in a position of undoubted danger, for were the girl to be followed and found in his company, he could not reasonably hope to escape death, since the simple explanation which he might be able to make in his own language would not be understood by his captors. Taking the girl gently by the arm, he raised her to her feet, and then, for

the moment forgetting that there could be no reply, exclaimed :

“In the name of God, what are you doing here ?”

The girl raised her eyes inquiringly to Mark's, and then, accompanying the gesture with what was doubtless an explanation in her own tongue, pointed in the direction of the village she had left with a look of horror and disgust. Then turning, she pointed westward with her arm well elevated, indicative of distance, and taking up the bear-skin, walked off with a dozen mimic steps in that direction, meantime motioning Mark to follow.

This rendered it tolerably clear to Mark that she either wished to follow him or him to follow her some distance westward—but how far? The inquiry was easily made and understood, for the Indian is eloquent in gesture. Resting the side of his head for a moment upon his hand to indicate sleep, he pointed westward, and raised his feet three or four times as if walking ; then raising and spreading the fingers of one hand, he began to count them with the other, inviting an answer as he slowly proceeded.

She interrupted him with a smile. She understood his meaning perfectly. After leaning the side of her head upon her hand as he had done, and closing her eyes, she raised both hands, and to his amazement extended the fingers and thumbs of each. Dropping her hands, she again raised one of

them with the fingers and thumb extended, and alternately bowed and shook her head as if in doubt. The answer was as plain as she could make it, and very distinctly told Mark that the point vaguely indicated by the girl could not be reached in less than a ten or fifteen days' journey.

With motions and looks of displeasure he tried to induce her to return to the village. In reply she pointed to his rifle, and holding up her hands, invited him to kill her. There was a heroism in this which brought tears to the eyes of Mark, and then and there he would have fought the whole tribe in defense of the desperate and resolute child. He raised his rifle as if to shoot, to see how much of the solemn pantomime was genuine. With her arms still raised, she closed her eyes, and motionless and unflinchingly awaited the death she had invited. He lowered the weapon, and she opened her eyes with an expression which plainly said, "Why do you hesitate?"

Mark stood awed in the presence of such courage and contempt of death in a child; and with a feeling of self-reproach at having subjected them to a test so extreme, he dropped the rifle and threw his arms around the brave little girl as if to ask her pardon for his cruelty. She looked up curiously into his eyes, still filled with tears, and seeing reflected there a heart overflowing with kindness and humanity—sentiments of which she had been taught

to know but little—she dropped to the ground and clasped and laid her head against his knees.

This sealed the compact. Mark had made a bluff and ignominiously failed, and he could no more think of abandoning or driving back the brave little child than as if she had been his own sister. But no time was to be lost. If she had been missed from the village, it was probable that parties were already upon her trail, and his hope of safety rested in his ability to reach the emigrant road by the nearest route before they could be tracked and overtaken.

He therefore turned abruptly northward, and in the course of two or three hours came in view of the broad valley through which wound the dusty road to the distant West. Cholera-plagued though it was, never before had the sight of it been half so grateful to his eyes.

The girl kept up bravely with him, and seemed to know that the safety of both depended upon their reaching the road. At every elevation she looked cautiously around, as if fearing pursuit, and then with the agility of an antelope sprang forward to overtake her companion, whose steps were rapidly bent toward the valley.


Reaching the road, they traveled along it until darkness overtook them, in search of an encampment; but not a train was in sight. Mark looked up and down the valley, but the light of no camp-fire was visible, and as he was weary with a long

and exciting day's march, he concluded to find a resting-place for the night. He had killed nothing during the day, not daring to trust the report of his rifle while in the hills; but they had an abundance of dried meat with which to stay their hunger, and did not look beyond it.

They ate their simple supper in darkness, for it was deemed unsafe to light a fire which might serve as a guide to their pursuers; after which they crawled into a thick clump of willows, where they made their beds of leaves and branches for the night. Mark soon fell asleep, but the child, apprehensive of danger, sat up and watched through the screening willows, listening to the howling of distant wolves, and the dismal hoot of the owls almost above their heads.

About ten o'clock, or perhaps an hour later, the moon rose, and not long after the patter of horses' feet was heard down the valley. The girl aroused her companion, who soon discovered the cause of her alarm. He seized his rifle, placed his knife and ammunition within easy reach, and grimly prepared for the best defense possible should they be discovered. He looked at the girl, who was crouching near him, and in her hand discovered a knife, which had probably been secreted in the bear-skin roll.

Poor child! what could she do in an encounter with strong and desperate men? Little, perhaps, except to die bravely, and this she had evidently




resolved to do rather than submit to re-capture. Notwithstanding the danger, Mark could scarcely repress a smile as the moonbeams trickled through the willows and fell upon the face of the dauntless little amazon.

Every moment the sound of the horses' feet became more and more distinct, until eight or ten warriors finally dashed up and halted in front of the willows. The spot had been the camping-place of many, and little piles of stones and ashes were scattered over a space of two or three acres. The savages stood boldly out in the moonlight, two or three of them armed with guns, and the remainder with spears and bows and arrows, and the heart of Mark, crouching within twenty yards of them, beat almost loud enough for them to hear its pulsations.

After a few words of hurried conversation, which the girl seemed to understand, two of the warriors dismounted and plunged their hands into some of the piles of ashes around them. Discovering no warmth in the ashes to indicate that a fire had lately been kindled there, they remounted, and after some further conversation the party started more leisurely down the valley, apparently in the direction whence they came.

As the sound of the horses' hoofs died away in the distance, with a feeling of relief Mark prepared to rise to his feet. Quick as thought the hand of the girl was laid upon his arm, and he was impressively motioned to remain quiet. In a few minutes





she cautiously rose, and with the noiseless movement of a serpent glided through the thicket. She was absent perhaps ten minutes, which seemed almost as many hours to Mark. Although their conversation implied that they had abandoned further search up the valley, with true Indian sagacity she determined to ascertain for herself that none of the savages had been left behind secreted in the neighborhood of the willows. Hence the reconnoissance.

She returned satisfied, and with a smile upon her young face which Mark correctly construed into a knowledge of the final departure of her pursuers. Before he could rise the child knelt and put her brown arms around his neck with a look of gratitude which required no language to interpret.

She intimated that the danger was over, and soon curled down upon her mat of leaves with the bearskin under her, and passed into a quiet sleep. Mark was too much excited over the events of the day to close his eyes again until more than half the night was gone; and as he lay upon his blanket that warm summer night, in the depths of an almost trackless wilderness, looking up at the stars through the willow leaves, and with a mysterious little Indian girl beside him who would neither be left nor driven away; as thus he lay, thinking of the dangers he had passed and the possible perils before him, he felt that he was living a romance wilder than imagination could invent, and a little too real even for the romantic soul of Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs.

Believing an early start advisable, Mark rose with the coming daylight. His companion was still sleeping. He looked at her for a moment, hesitating whether or not to wake her. He finally reached into his saddle-bags, and putting his flute together, with a laugh in his eyes began softly to play "Wake, Lady, Wake." She opened her eyes and gazed at Mark with a bewildered stare. He smiled at her confusion, and in a moment she recollected where she was, and sprang to her feet with a childish laugh as musical as the songs of the birds above them.

Their breakfast consisted of dried meat and water, and the sun had scarcely shown his face before they were on their way up the valley. Deviating a mile or two from the road, they traveled rapidly for five or six hours, when Mark succeeded in bringing down an antelope, just as he overtook, a short distance to the right, a long train of wagons.

He dressed and threw the carcass over his shoulder, and started for the train. As he reached it the emigrants were halting for dinner and a mid-day rest. Mark's sudden appearance among them, with a dressed antelope on his shoulder, and an Indian girl at his heels, excited general wonder. To avoid answering too many questions, he briefly explained the manner in which the girl became his companion, and then invited the forty or fifty persons composing the party, to help themselves to antelope steaks and chops, reserving but a small portion for himself and little charge.

A second invitation was not required, and in a few minutes the carcass was divided out among the hungry travelers. In return, liberal tenders of flour, coffee, sugar and bacon were made. Mark sparingly accepted such supplies as he and his companion were able to conveniently carry, and after partaking of a substantial dinner, they left the train and resumed their journey up the valley.

And so they traveled on for ten or twelve days, sometimes encamping with a train, if convenient, but oftener sleeping out in the treeless hills, with the stars above them, and solitude on every side. The evenings were dark, for the moon was waning, and after supper Mark would sit in the light of their little camp-fire, and waft out into the silence of the night the mellow music of his flute. Sometimes, when he struck upon a melody which was the favorite of another whose image lived with him in his wanderings, a sweet face looked in upon him from the darkness, and tears came unbidden to his eyes; and the little girl crouching at his feet would wonder at the music, which was new to her, and at the tears which she could not understand.

In crossing a small stream, one evening, Mark lost his footing among the rocks, and pitched headlong into the water. He cared but little for the wetting, but in attempting to save his rifle he sprained his left wrist. The limb pained him so badly that he slept but little that night, and the next morning found it considerably swollen. The child

was frightened when Mark showed her the maimed limb, for she knew he could not use his rifle, which she had learned to regard not only as their defense and bulwark against danger, but as their only means of procuring food. Although he assured her that he felt but little pain, and that the wrist would soon be as strong as ever, he thought it prudent to remain quiet for a day or two, and apply such simple remedies as were within his reach. He therefore made himself as comfortable as possible, and by the continuous application of cold water succeeded during the day in considerably reducing the swelling.

The child was tireless in her attentions, bathing the limb with water, and, in imitation of the medicine men of her tribe, rubbing and talking to it to conjure the pain away. Mark continued to apply cold water the next day, and with such success, that the following morning the wrist was quite strong again, and they resumed their journey.

After Mark had concluded to remain in camp until he was able to use his wrist, he discovered that their little stock of provisions was running low. This troubled him greatly ; but late in the afternoon his anxiety was relieved, for after being absent for about an hour, the girl returned with two prairie-dogs. He knew she had found a village of them not far from camp, and there was no longer any danger of their suffering from hunger, no matter how long it might be necessary for them to remain there.

The prairie-dog is a large ground-squirrel, with a head somewhat resembling that of a dog. As its only language is an utterance suggestive of the bark of a puppy, and owls and rattlesnakes find hospitable lodgment in its underground habitation, its flesh is popularly regarded as human food of questionable fitness. But the prairie-dog is always fat, and, closing the eyes to prejudice, is in every respect, as a food, the equal of the gray squirrel. Dressed and slowly roasted before a camp-fire, the hunter or traveler seldom finds flesh more palatable than that of the prairie-dog.

How the girl captured the animals Mark was unable to ascertain ; but the second day she brought in two more, and was as proud of the service she was able to render Mark as she was delighted at the relish with which he partook of the meat prepared for him.

As Indians of certain tribes are entitled to no distinctive names, until they have earned them by deeds of note, in battle, or the chase, so it almost seemed that Mark's little companion, after providing him with food, esteemed herself at last worthy of being known to him by her Indian name ; for when she returned the second day she brought with her a little pink and purple flower. Holding it up before Mark, and pointing to it, she pronounced the word *Ootoo*, and then pointing to herself, repeated it. Mark then knew that her name was Ootoo, and that she was called after the little wild flower in her

hand ; and thenceforth he called her Ootoo, and she was pleased that he remembered the name. In return he told her that his name was Mark ; but *Muck* was about as near as she was ever able to come to the pronunciation of it.

In two or three days Mark's wrist ceased to trouble him, and abundance again waited upon the report of his rifle. On the evening of the fourteenth day after leaving the village from which Ootoo escaped, they reached and encamped beside a large spring, about three miles from the road, the waters from which run down into the valley, but in dry weather sink or evaporate before they reach the Platte. She had no appetite for supper, and was feverish and restless during the night.

After breakfast, the next morning, Mark threw his rifle and saddle-bags over his shoulders and prepared to start. He motioned Ootoo to follow, but to his astonishment, she remained sitting upon the ground, her face buried in her hands. Soon she rose to her feet, and shaking her head sadly, pointed southward among the low hills skirting the valley of the Platte.

In a moment he understood her. She had reached the end of her journey with him. But where was she going ? There was no Indian village in sight, and Mark's heart rebelled at the thought of leaving her alone in that desolate place, without knowing her destination, or the difficulties of reaching it. He was sorely distressed ; but what could

he do? If it was cruel to leave her, he could only follow her at the risk of his life.

While he was revolving the troublesome dilemma in his mind, she sprang forward and took him by the hand as if to lead him, again pointing southward. He inquired the distance, as he had done before. Placing the side of her head against her hand, she smiled and intimated "no sleep;" then pointing to the sun, still low in the East, slowly raised her arm almost vertically, and held it there for a moment; the interpretation of which was, that the distance to be traveled could be made in a walk of four or five hours.

As there seemed to be no cruelty in leaving her there, and but little danger in following her so short a distance, a new impulse seized Mark. The spirit of adventure surmounted every sentiment of discretion, and he resolved to accompany the girl to the end of her journey, as he was curious to know what circumstance had thrown the little waif in his way. He accordingly signified his willingness to follow her.

At this announcement the joy of the child knew no bounds. She wept, sang, danced, and threw her arms around Mark with an energy that was almost hysterical. Then, as if fearful that he might reconsider his determination, she hastily rolled up the bear-skin, and started toward the hills almost in a run, beckoning him to follow. Mark had no idea

of disappointing the child, and in a few minutes joined her on the way to her people.

Through a dry ravine they ascended the low hills, and in less than an hour struck a trail which seemed to enter the Platte valley west of them. This, she intimated, would lead them to their journey's end, a development very gratifying to Mark, as by its aid he could easily retrace his steps. The path wound among a succession of rolling hills for a distance of five or six miles, in the intervening valleys of which small herds of buffalo were continually encountered.

They finally reached a small valley, the drainage of which appeared to be eastward. It was four or five miles in breadth, thickly carpeted with grass and flowers, and the borders studded at intervals with clumps of stunted junipers. The streaks of rank verdure, interspersed with groves of cottonwood putting down from the low hills, on both sides of the valley, showed that it abounded in springs. Hundreds of horses were quietly grazing in the valley, and behind a line of cottonwoods on the opposite side smoke was seen rising. Ootoo pointed toward it, and Mark knew the village from which it rose was the end of her journey. It was a charming spot, and Mark stood for some moments enraptured with the red man's paradise, before descending into the valley.

Disregarding the trail, which was scarcely visible among the grass and flowers, Ootoo took a direct course to the village across the valley. As



she approached it, so rapid was her walk that Mark could with difficulty keep her company. In fact, it was almost a run, and once or twice he was compelled to ask her to moderate her pace.

At length they reached the cottonwoods, behind which was observed an Indian village of four or five hundred lodges. It was near the middle of the day, and the male occupants were lounging in and around their wigwams. Many of the women were engaged in slicing and drying buffalo meat, and manufacturing baskets, moccasins and other articles of ornament and utility. To stakes around many of the lodges were fastened young bears, wolves and buffaloes, and the piles of bones and offal scattered around exhaled an odor which no extent of familiarity could ever make agreeable to Mark.

As they entered the village hundreds of men, women and children rose and gazed curiously at them, many of the former having hastily seized their weapons, while quite an equal number of Indian dogs, resembling a small wolf or coyote in appearance, crossed their paths from every direction, and ran yelping at their heels. Mark was accustomed to these demonstrations, and without halting followed Ootoo more than half through the village. There she stopped, and looked around for a moment as if in doubt; then turning suddenly, she beckoned Mark to follow, and ran rather than walked toward a large lodge, the sides of which were embellished

with the skins of the wolf, wildcat, bear, fox and other animals.

Reaching the entrance, Ootoo boldly drew aside the bear-skin covering and peered in. Two women, one of them young and the other middle-aged, made their appearance at the opening, beside which Mark was standing unobserved by the occupants. A few words were hastily spoken, when both women sprang out of the lodge and clasped Ootoo in their arms with wild exclamations of delight. Discovering the presence of Mark, with a rifle in his hand and hatchet in his belt, the startled women seized Ootoo by the arm and attempted to re-enter the lodge. The child resisted, and a few word from her calmed the women, and a few more brought the elder, who was the mother of Ootoo, to his feet. She could not sufficiently express her gratitude ; and as the girl continued to explain how generously she had been treated by Mark, and how he had risked his life to save her, the mother patted his hands and face, and gave various other extravagant expressions of her appreciation of his kindness to her child.

The other, who was the sister of Ootoo and a very comely savage, was less demonstrative. She took him by the hand, and with maidenly reserve turned her face away as she placed the other upon his shoulder, and expressed her thanks in words which he, of course, could not understand. Mark was amused at the coyish demeanor of the sister, who was the belle of the village, as he afterwards

discovered, and good-naturedly increased her embarrassment by kissing her as she turned away. The manner in which it was done pleased them all, and none more, perhaps, than the dusky beauty who had received the unexpected salutation. The Indians are not a kissing people as a rule, but the sister showed that very little practice would popularize the custom with her.

As a large crowd was collecting, Mark was invited into the lodge, and seated upon the softest cushion of furs with which it was provided. His rifle and saddle-bags were safely deposited in a corner near him, and in a little while dried meats, a species of wild celery, and a basket of roasted bulbs resembling small artichokes, were brought in, and everything possible was done to make him feel that he was welcome and among friends.

He soon learned that he was in the lodge of the chief of the village, who was absent with a large party, including his two sons, on a buffalo hunt, and would probably return that evening. The Indians belonged to the great Sioux nation, and from what Mark was able to learn while in the village, the girl he rescued was carried off about a year before by a marauding band of Arapahoes, or some other tribe, while the warriors of the village were absent on a raid against some tribe adjoining them on the south. Exactly how the abduction occurred he was unable to ascertain; but after a long search among the tribes for many days' journey around, the child was

finally given up as lost, and the apparel and trinkets she left behind were buried with the usual ceremonies of mourning for the dead. The great joy of the mother and sister at her return need not therefore be wondered at; and if their expressions of gratitude were almost ungovernable in their sincerity, it was because they regarded Mark as the medium through which the child had been returned to them as from the grave itself.

Proud of her deliverer, Ootoo cheerfully satisfied the curiosity of the hundreds who crowded around the lodge to learn something of the pale-face and the object of his visit to the village. She told them how he had faced death in her defense; how strong and brave he was; how unerring was the aim of his rifle; and finally, that he would remain in the village but a short time, and the whole valley would be blessed by his coming. Ootoo's story was soon known to all, and when Mark reappeared among the lodges in the afternoon, with the little daughter of the chief walking proudly by his side, he was treated with the respect which the red man knows how to bestow upon one who deserves his friendship, and whose reputation for courage is established.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Mark Among the Sioux.—A Wild Adventure, and what  
Came of It.*



BEFORE sundown the hunting party returned, their horses laden with buffalo meat and other products of the chase. Child-like, Ootoo could not wait until the arrival of her father and brothers, but ran to meet them as they entered the village from the valley. They were astounded as she presented herself before them. The chief, who was mounted, gave her a bewildered look, and reaching down and taking her by the hand, drew her up in front of him, and held her to his heart. The brothers, both stalwart and handsome young braves, rode up, and first one and then the other seized the girl and drew her in front of him; and so they went through the village, Ootoo joyfully permitting herself to be transferred from horse to horse, briefly explaining, as opportunity offered, the salient circumstances of her captivity and deliverance; for she was anxious that her rude relatives should be

apprised, before meeting Mark, of his generous services to her in effecting her escape.

As the party drew up at the lodge in front of which Mark was standing unarmed, the returning hunters to the number of one or two hundred surrounded it, and for a few minutes he was in doubt whether or not the noisy demonstration was the prelude of an assault. He was soon relieved of the unpleasant suspicion, however, for Ootoo sprang to the ground, and running up, took him confidently by the hand and stood beside him. It was a pretty picture, the little Indian maiden standing there beside her unarmed white friend, in the midst of a sea of savage faces, and interposing between him and the very thought of harm the shield of her guileless love.

The chief was the first to greet the stranger, and this he did most warmly, by first taking Mark by both hands, and then placing the hands of each upon the other's shoulders, in the meantime addressing him in words which he could not understand, but which must have been extremely cordial, since the face of Ootoo showed that they greatly delighted her. He next took from his crown of feathers a long eagle's plume, and placing it in Mark's hat, bowed and pointed toward the door of his lodge. The brothers of the girl then saluted Mark with words of gratitude and welcome, and taking him by both arms, courteously led him into the lodge.

These ceremonies, witnessed by hundreds of the

tribe, gave Mark at once a friendly standing in the village, and when the chief publicly explained what the stranger had done, the painted crowd dispersed with grunts of unqualified approval.

Mark was now a hero, and the story of his exploits, and prowess, greatly exaggerated by the partiality of Ootoo, were the talk and wonder of the village. He was ignorant of the exact character of Ootoo's story of their adventures, but half suspected, from the respect and awe with which he was treated, that she was guilty of declaring that, on the night following their departure from the village of her captors, he slew in a hand-to-hand combat the entire party of forty or fifty painted and desperate warriors in pursuit. Had he been disposed to contradict the preposterous story, his limited knowledge of the Sioux dialect rendered it impossible for him to do so, and he was therefore compelled to wear the honors with which Ootoo's imagination had clothed him.

Four or five of the lodges in the immediate neighborhood of the more pretentious quarters of the chief were occupied by members of his family. The elder brother had a wife and one child, and the younger was to be married at the next full moon. In the lodge of the latter Mark was provided with quarters, and his couch was of the soft furs intended for the bride. The young brave occupied the lodge with Mark, and being of about the same age, their







intercourse was exceedingly unrestrained and friendly.

Mark spent the evening in the lodge of the chief, lighted by a fire in front of it, and at the suggestion of Ootoo, who seemed determined to exhibit all of his accomplishments, produced his flute, and for an hour or two delighted the savages with some of its sweetest notes.

The lodge was filled with the relatives of the chief, the women adorned with their choicest ornaments of beads, feathers, and embroidered garments. The younger brother's bride was also there, glittering in savage finery, and all were charmed with the mellow music of the flute. The fire in front of the lodge threw into it a bright light, and the group of men, women and children, of which Mark was the center, would have made a charming study for an artist.

Ootoo sat at the feet of Mark, gazing up into his face, and her sister, whose name was Eleta, captivated by the tender strains of the instrument, gradually and almost unconsciously moved the robe upon which she was sitting closer and closer to him, until one of her brothers, in a spirit of merriment, seized and placed her beside the musician, after a resistance distinguished by no means for its energy. A general laugh followed, the chief joining in most heartily. Entering into the spirit of the frolic, with an affectation of ardor which was pretty nearly genuine, Mark smilingly threw his

arms around the girl, and drew her to his side. She averted her face as he turned his toward her, which occasion renewed amusement when the mother, in explanation, referred to his unusual salutation on first meeting Eleta. Mark resumed his music, the girl, notwithstanding her real or assumed timidity, remaining by his side.

Attracted by the sound of the flute, hundreds of the inhabitants of the village collected around the lodge to listen to the music, and there remained until the last note had died away on the balmy Summer air.

After a lunch of dried and cooked meats, taking his rifle and saddle-bags with him, Mark retired with the younger brother to their lodge, all the party shaking hands with him as he passed out. In giving her hand to him Eleta did not turn her face away. The invitation was plain enough to Mark, but he prepared to avail himself of it so deliberately as to divide the responsibility, and she was compelled to break away from him to save herself from further ridicule. The wit of the Indian is in his ridicule, and he uses it alike to delight his friends and provoke his enemies.

Owing to the return of the hunters with their freightage of fresh meats, the village was in good-natured confusion until near midnight. Mark was weary with the travels and incidents of the day, and soon fell asleep upon his soft couch of furs, his thoughts floating into dreamland on strains of soft-

est melody, mingled with the misty forms of Indian maidens gaudy in trappings of aboriginal splendor. In respect to Mark, and as a precaution against intrusion, his companion slept near the opening of the lodge.

When Mark awoke in the morning he found the brother gone, but near him, fast asleep, was Ootoo. She must have noiselessly entered the lodge sometime during the night, and quietly curled down upon her bear-skin robe beside him. Just as he had done before, he took the flute from his saddle-bags, and awoke her with its dulcet voice; she opened her eyes with a face beaming with happiness, and springing to her feet, led him to the family lodge, where their rude morning meal had been prepared.

He then learned that a large hunting party, including the chief and his two sons, had left the village before daylight, the report having been brought that a large herd of buffaloes, miles in extent, was moving northward across the valley five or six miles below. The chief left word with his family to persuade Mark to remain by all means until his return, which might not be until the day following.

This was communicated to Mark by Ootoo in the eloquent gestures of the western tribes, and when he hesitated about complying, both Eleta and her sister added to the persuasion of their looks the argument of gentle force, by putting their arms around him, and refusing to relinquish their hold

until he promised to remain. Nor could the menace of kissing them remove their arms. To the insinuation Ootoo joyfully presented her little face, and Eleta, fortified with the consciousness of dutifully endeavoring to obey the will of her father, was unable to disguise her willingness to submit to the embrace. Such freedom with a white stranger would have been a shock even to Sioux propriety, but for the circumstances attending and seeming to justify it. As it was, the mother nodded her head approvingly, and, much against his judgment, Mark was constrained to consent to await the return of the party.

He spent the day pleasantly in watching the women of the village at their labors in drying meats, and the old men in manufacturing and repairing bows, arrows, lances, knives and other implements of battle and the chase. It was interesting to observe the skill and patience with which masses of obdurate flint or obsidian were broken, scaled and picked into arrow and spear heads, and the ingenuity displayed in converting pieces of old iron into knives, arrow points and other articles of utility. Knives, beads, tobacco, blankets, sugar, needles and other articles were sparingly obtained from distant trading stations in exchange for horses, furs and dried buffalo tongues; but this branch of the great Sioux tribe seemed to have but little intercourse with the whites at that time, and were therefore more self-reliant and had fewer vices than the

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bands living nearer the frontier settlements. Mark was kindly received by all, and was continually urged to accept presents of dried meats, furs and tanned antelope and deer-skins; but as he was the bearer of his own burden, he was compelled in every instance to decline the friendly gifts.

During the evening he again entertained the family with his flute, the now unembarrassed Eleta sitting beside him, and attempting in her wild voice to catch its melodies. She was graceful as an antelope, and her face the most attractive that Mark had seen in all his travels among the red men. Her presence at his side was therefore not unwelcome, and he sometimes wished that he was a plumed and painted savage, that he might woo her in true Indian style.

Early in the afternoon of the day following the hunting party returned, bringing with them many tons of buffalo meat, and a number of green hides, to be tanned into robes or used in the construction of lodges. The chief and his sons were greatly pleased that Mark had awaited their return; but he informed them that he could remain no longer, and should leave the next morning, as he had a journey of many sleeps before him.

That evening, as Mark and his friends were sitting around the door of the lodge, watching the twilight fade away among the western hills, the chief, after talking for some time in an undertone to his sons, suddenly rose, and taking Mark by the

hand, expressed a wish in gestures plain enough to be understood, that he would abandon his westward journey, and remain permanently with the tribe. He directed Mark's attention to the dangers of the journey, and the deaths that were occurring daily along the route ; and, finally, as a further inducement, called Eleta up and offered her to him for a wife. Nor did he stop there. Knowing that Ootoo was much attached to Mark, he informed him that he could have her, also, as soon as she reached the age of her sister.

The proposal was received with undisguised satisfaction by both girls. Eleta dropped her eyes to the ground and remained silent ; but Ootoo seized Mark by the hand, and leading him to her sister, attempted to clasp her arms around both. Mark had never before been placed in a position quite so embarrassing. But he was compelled to decline the proffered alliance, declaring that he had already one wife at home, and his people would kill him should he take another. The chief received the information kindly ; but Eleta manifested the keenest disappointment, and Ootoo was inconsolable.

Under the circumstances, Mark's last evening in the village was spent much less pleasantly than the first. He retired early, the younger brother occupying the lodge with him, and at sunrise the next morning was ready to start. As he was about to bid his red friends good-bye, a horse was led to the door of the lodge, bridled and with a buffalo robe

belted around him, over which was thrown the skin of a lynx, carefully tanned and beautifully embroidered with quills and feathers. The stirrups and hangings were a broad strip of buffalo hide, looped at the ends for the feet and thrown over the back of the animal, while wound around the neck was a long rawhide *riata*. The bridle was a simple cord of braided horse-hair, tied at the middle around the lower jaw, and the ends forming the reins were fastened together and thrown over the neck.

Mark was invited to fill his saddle-bags with dried meats and such other provisions as the lodge afforded. This done, the chief handed him a round piece of tanned buffalo-skin two or three inches in diameter, on one side of which was rudely drawn the head of a wolf. Mark understood its purport. It was an order of safety and assistance to all owing allegiance to the chief whose tribal insignia it bore.

Shaking hands with the family, and kissing little Ootoo, who was sobbing as if her heart would break, Mark threw his saddle-bags over the back of the animal, and mounting, rode rapidly out of the village with his rifle upon his shoulder, kindly farewells following him as far as the human voice could be heard.

After crossing the valley and failing to find the trail which led him into it, he concluded to take a line across the hills representing the hypotenuse of the triangle made in his journey from the road to the village, and therefore turned the head of his



horse in a north-westerly direction, and undeviatingly maintained that point of compass all day, with but little rest either to himself or the hardy animal he bestrode. Although he must have traveled thirty or forty miles, no sign of a road was visible, and as night came on he encamped beside a pool of unpalatable water, which seemed to have neither outlet nor permanent source of supply. But it was the first water he had seen for eight hours, and he concluded to remain there for the night. He picketed the horse near the pool, around which for some distance the grass was rank and green, and as his canteen was empty, he made his supper of dried meat and a cup of its bitter waters.

The draught increased rather than allayed his thirst, and after spending a restless night, his slumbers disturbed by dreams of cool fountains continually turning to blood or brine as he reached to fill his cup, he rose with the sun and started for a small grove of cottonwoods which he discerned in a valley two or three miles to the south-west. This took him almost directly from the direction he now proposed to travel, for he rightly surmised that the road must have turned sharply northward at some point not far from where he had left it with Ootoo, and he concluded to reach it by the shortest possible route.

But his feverish thirst overruled every suggestion of discretion, and he determined to find water, even at the risk of never reaching the road. Those only

who, with glazed eye and tongue parched and swollen, have felt the pangs of extreme thirst, can appreciate the desperation with which the sufferer will reach into the very jaws of death for relief from an agony which almost paralyzes the reason.

Before reaching the grove, Mark discovered a number of Indians encamped near it without lodges, from which he inferred that they were a party of hunters who had remained there for the night. But had they been in war-paint, he would have faced them, rifle in hand, for a single cup of water, which he was sure might be obtained in the neighborhood of the camp-fire.

As he rode up he was received with grunts of curiosity, but with no intimation of rudeness or hostility. He motioned for water, and a small spring a few yards below was pointed out. He quickly dismounted, and, uncoiling the *riata* from the neck of his horse, led him to the spring, and was soon enjoying the most grateful draught that had ever passed his lips. While the horse was drinking from a small pool below, which had been formed by scraping a hole in the mud, Mark filled his canteen and rejoined the savages, who seemed to regard the animal he was leading with especial interest.

It flashed upon his mind that they belonged to the village he had left the morning before, and possibly knew the horse. If so, it was probable that they were absent during his stay in the village,

and could therefore know nothing of the manner in which he became possessed of the animal. As he could explain nothing, and the savages began to act in a somewhat threatening manner, the situation was assuming an unpleasant aspect, when he fortunately thought of the leathern token which the chief had given him at parting. Taking it from his pocket, he handed it with an air of indifference to the one whose head-feathers were the tallest, and then unconcernedly wound the *riata* around the neck of the horse preparatory to resuming his journey.

The token was carefully scanned as it was passed from hand to hand, and finally returned to Mark with the assurance that he was in the presence of friends and had nothing to fear. Their looks of menace and suspicion at once gave way to smiles and proffers of assistance, and Mark carefully replaced the figured disk in his pocket, with the knowledge that it had been of vital service to him.

After inquiring the nearest way to the road, and attempting to make them understand that he had left their village the day before, he accepted a few pounds of fresh venison, and after shaking hands with the entire party, mounted and rode rapidly off in the direction pointed out by the savages.

About twelve o'clock he again found sweet water, and as the heat of the sun was oppressive, and the horse began to exhibit symptoms of fatigue, he picketed the animal out to rest and graze for an

hour or two, and treated himself to a dinner of broiled venison. Resuming his journey, night again overtook him, with no sign of the Platte valley in sight.

He now began to feel some alarm. Before leaving Independence, he had procured a small map of the overland route, and an examination of it failed to make clear his position. He was satisfied that he must have long since passed the junction of the two great forks of the Platte, and that the valley of the South Platte must tend to the south-east; but how far he was from it was a matter of pure conjecture.

He rested uneasily that night, for the suspicion gradually grew upon him that he was lost in the wilderness. Nor was his disquiet relieved in the morning at finding his horse gone. The animal had been picketed near where he spread his blanket for the night, but the *riata* was broken and the horse had disappeared. He knew that a search for the animal was useless, and therefore shouldered his rifle and saddle-bags, and resumed his journey on foot, as he had commenced it, leaving everything behind with which the horse had been equipped, except the light lynx-skin robe.

He traveled in a north-westerly direction, over a country almost destitute of vegetation, with the exception of occasional patches of sage and cactus. Toward noon, with his canteen almost exhausted, and no indications of water near, he suddenly came

to a sandy desert, to the vision indefinite in length, and six or seven miles in breadth. The sands were mingled with alkali, and the surface, upon which not a blade of grass grew, was baked and smooth. He knew the waste must be crossed, and while straining his eyes to estimate the probable distance, thought he discerned water across the shimmering plain. It was very indistinct, however, and so closely resembled a mirage that he doubted the reality. But whatever might be the distance in miles, he knew it was to be measured, and, fortifying himself with a lunch of dried meat and his last mouthful of water, he boldly launched forth upon the glistening sea of sand.

Not a breath of air was stirring, and the heat of the cloudless sun, intensified by its reflection against the smooth surface of the heated sand, was almost unendurable. With such surroundings, there was no refreshment in rest, and Mark pushed steadily and desperately forward. Finally the desert was passed, and at its very verge were moving silently eastward the broad but shallow waters of the South Platte.

He disrobed and plunged into the stream, and in the luxury of the situation soon forgot the apprehensions and discomforts of the day. His course was now clear. He was above the crossing of the Platte, and determined to move down the river until he encountered the road.

He resumed his journey greatly refreshed, and

when night overtook him was still traveling along the edge of the desert, with the welcome waters of the Platte beside him. Before encamping for the night he was quite sure that he discerned in the distance the eastern end of the waste, and therefore spread his blanket upon the sand more hopeful than he had been for two days.

Not a sign of vegetation or animal life was around him, and the waters of the Platte moved noiselessly past. As he stretched his weary limbs for the night upon the smooth sand, the air motionless and the stars looking silently down into his face, he felt that, for the first time in his life, he was in the midst of absolute silence. Does the reader know the real meaning of absolute silence? Think for a moment. It is not upon the broad, calm bosom of the ocean, where, however noiseless may be wind and wave, the tribes of the deep are ever wrinkling the surface, and the waters lazily lap in audible and ceaseless murmur the objects fretting their serenity. It is not in field or forest, away from the habitations of men, for wherever vegetation lives, animal life abounds, and is tuneful to the listening ear. Nor is it upon the great saharas of the earth, whose restless sands, drifting almost before the zephyr's breath, are filled with insect life and voice. It is only upon the smooth and crusted alkaline wastes of the west, dead to vegetation and animal life of any and every kind, that complete and

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unchallenged silence reigns, and no one will seek its awful presence a second time.

To some organizations it is almost distracting. The ear is pained with it more than with the din of direst tumult. On tiptoe it listens for some sound, no matter what, to drown the dreadful pulsations of the heart, which beat like a drum in the surrounding silence. The blood can be heard coursing through the veins, and all the functions of the body seem to be roused to a noisy and rebellious activity, almost threatening the destruction of life itself. In desperation the victim breaks the awful spell by rending the silence with his voice, and only falls to sleep when exhausted with efforts to listen to sounds which never reach him.

So was it with Mark. When he first closed his eyes and invited slumber, the stillness came like a balm to his senses. Then he listened for some familiar sound, that his mind might be diverted from the throbbing of his heart, which seemed to increase in emphasis with each pulsation. But the sluggish stream a few yards away moved noiselessly past, and nothing was heard beyond the vital energies of his own being. The howl of a wolf, the bark of a prairie dog or the buzz of a passing beetle, would have been welcome music to his ear; but all around was silence—silence profound as that of the tomb. He spoke, but his voice sounded sepulchral and strange. He rose and walked to hear the

fall of his feet, and so continued until past midnight, when he dropped and fell asleep at last, after his wearied senses had become too much benumbed to take note of anything.



## CHAPTER VII.

### *The Cholera—Mark Becomes the Protector of Three Little Children—The Mysterious Ox.*



HEN Mark awoke in the morning from his troubled sleep on the noiseless desert, the rising sun plainly marked the eastern limit of the desolate waste, and before noon he reached the road and upper crossing of the Platte.

With a feeling of safety came back the boyish impulses which a menace of death alone could temporarily restrain, and taking the flute from his saddle-bags, he marched down to the stream to the air of "Over the River to Charley." The river at that point, and for hundreds of miles above and below it, is broad and shallow, the banks low and the bottom covered with quicksand. As he reached the stream a train of eight or ten wagons was just emerging from the other side, the drivers wading and frantically lashing the cattle to keep them moving, the impression being general that, should they stop for a moment, wagons and all would be hopelessly buried in the treacherous sands.



After safely reaching the shore, some of them turned to listen to the strange notes floating to them from across the waters, and beckoned Mark to plunge in and follow. He required no such invitation. He knew the only way for him to cross the Platte was to wade or swim it; and fastening his boots around his neck, he hung the saddle-bags, into which everything had been crammed, across his head, and with his rifle in both hands, like the balance-pole of a rope-dancer, cautiously started on his watery journey. He observed that the bottom was firm and smooth so long as he continued to advance, but in standing, the sands steadily gave way under the pressure of his feet, and he gradually sank into them. One experiment, which buried him almost to his knees, sufficed, and he pressed steadily forward until he touched the shore, the water at no time reaching above his arm-pits.

His progress was watched with interest by the members of the train, and when he finally climbed the bank, the curiosity of all was aroused, for they had seen him approach the road as if traveling eastward.

"Where do you hail from?" "Where are you going?" "What train do you belong to?" "What route are you traveling?" These were a few of the questions propounded to Mark as he silently drew on his boots and put his baggage in order.

"Weary and dirty fellow-travelers toward the sunset!" finally replied Mark to the crowd gathered



around him; "I am the embodiment of a well-organized and abundantly-provisioned train of twenty wagons. I hail from the Missouri river, and scorn to travel in the dusty highways. The hills are my larder, this rifle my faithful steward, and my tent is canopied with stars. A few days ago I took a detour southward, on a brief visit to a number of friends among the Sioux. I shall wait a few minutes to recover my breath and allow my clothes to dry, and then leave you with my blessing, and move on!"

This explanation was not entirely satisfactory to Mark's listeners; but it sounded something like a general answer to the most of their straightforward questions, and they were not repeated.

"Well, stranger," said one of them, good-naturedly—a tall, raw-boned specimen from the Wabash—"whoever you may be, I'm bettin' you'll find the place you're huntin'. If yer arn't crazy, you're the most independent train that ever forded the Platte; and as we've a little corn-juice left, and yer pants is wet, come to the wagon and give you're stummick a bilin' with a drop or two."

Feeling that a mouthful of spirits would do him no harm, Mark accepted the invitation with thanks, and under the softening influence of the potation gave a somewhat more explicit account of himself, and in return learned that many trains were still suffering from cholera, and that two of their own party had been buried the day before.

Under the circumstances, Mark did not deem it prudent to linger long with the train, and in a few minutes was on his way, leaving behind his dusty friends from the Wabash.

During the afternoon he passed a number of trains, and ascertained with alarm that the cholera had visited them all. Leaving the road, he brought down an antelope, and spent the night alone among the adjacent hills.

He probably ate too heartily of the fresh meat, for the next morning he was suffering from what he feared were premonitory symptoms of cholera. Were he to be attacked by the scourge two or three miles from the road, he would be in a no less hopeless than helpless condition ; and the thought of dying alone in the hills, with the wolves fighting for his body, gave speed to his feet as daylight came, and the sun was still low in the east when he reached the road and a train of five wagons encamped near it.

The train belonged to a substantial Missourian whose name was Kent. In addition to his own family, consisting of a wife and three children, the youngest a babe at the breast, and the eldest a boy of seven or eight years, he was taking to the Pacific coast fourteen or fifteen young men, one of whom was accompanied by his wife. Kent had been a country merchant, and in two of the wagons were small assortments of dry goods. They were care-

fully packed in the bottoms of the vehicles, and were of but little inconvenience to the occupants.

As Mark approached, Kent was standing with folded arms in front of his tent. He threw the saddle-bags from his shoulder, and without a word sat down upon a wagon-tongue. Kent looked at him for a moment, and then, without scarcely moving a muscle, sadly said :

"And *you* have a touch of it, too ! Well, we'll all die, I reckon. Four died yesterday, and the boys are digging graves for three more this morning. The medicine we have don't seem to do much good, but you'd better try it."

He entered the tent, and in a moment returned with a gill or more of a fiery compound in a tin cup, the principal ingredients of which were capsicum and laudanum. Mark placed the cup mechanically to his lips, and with a simple "thank you," swallowed the contents.

"Now lie down until we get ready to start," said the man, kindly, "and if the cramps catch you, call me."

Mark wrapped his blanket around his shoulders, and dropping down near one of the wagons with his saddle-bags under his head, was soon fast asleep. The draught relieved him at once, and the laudanum with which it was largely compounded closed his eyes in peaceful slumber.

When he awoke the dead had been buried, and the cattle were being yoked. To the astonishment

of Kent, Mark sprang to his feet, with no symptom of cholera remaining. To the inquiry of how he felt, he replied, "All right, with the exception of a little weakness, which will not last long."

Informing Kent of how he was traveling, the latter prevailed upon him to remain with the train a few days, as it was dangerous for him to be alone, and they might be of mutual service to each other. After some hesitation, Mark finally consented, and throwing his saddle-bags and rifle into one of the wagons, reported himself ready to give a helping hand whenever it was required.

The wagons were moved by cattle, and the herd embraced one yoke of cows. The death of nine of the party in four days had lessened the necessities of transportation, and two of the wagons were left, together with ten or twelve superfluous cattle, the most of them afflicted with sore and tender feet, and a disease called "foot evil." The train, now consisting of twelve men, women and children, with three wagons, moved on, Mark driving one of the teams.

Thenceforth Mark's journey westward was a continuation of horrors. During the forenoon several were taken down and placed in the wagons, and when the train halted at midday, two more graves were made, one of them for the wife of the young man who had charge of the train in the absence of Kent.

Another wagon was left, and the bed was made

into rude coffins for the dead. The still, sultry air seemed to be laden with the malaria of death, and the survivors, pale with horror, moved silently about, and spoke almost in whispers, as if fearful of inviting the attention of the passing pestilence.

The most of the dry goods in the two remaining wagons were left by the way-side, as were also one or two tons of provisions; and the train again moved on, slowly and solemnly as a funeral cortege.

Before leaving camp in the evening, but three men remained upon their feet, and the succeeding twelve hours were ghastly in their details of suffering and death in that doomed little camp by the dusty road between the forks of the Platte. The cattle were turned out to roam at will, and the supper prepared was scant and scarcely tasted.

All night long, Mark and a single companion were bending over the sick, administering medicines and rubbing down the cramps, which moved in knotted agony up and down the limbs, and when the sun lay like a red and angry ball of fire upon the low eastern plains, Mark and his faithful helper were all of the men remaining alive, Kent having passed away in the arms of his wife just as the day began to break.

Heart-broken, the poor woman was assisted into her wagon by Mark, where she dropped upon the mattress beside her sleeping children. Mark sat down bewildered among the dead. He tried to think, but his mind scarcely returned an intelligent

response. Dave, his remaining helper, approached, and in a choked and tremulous voice said, "Well, what next?"

True; what next! But what could be next except to bury the dead and leave the plague-haunted spot? In an hour, with pick and shovel, a shallow pit in the sand was made, large enough for the four bodies awaiting burial, and, abandoning another wagon, the boards of the bed were placed over the dead, and they were covered from sight.

While Dave brought in the cattle, Mark made a pot of coffee, and provided a breakfast of bacon and pancakes. Mrs. Kent, who lay sobbing with her infant in her arms, could eat nothing. When the children awoke, the boy asked what had become of his father and all the people in the train. The little girl, four or five years of age, was less observing. Mark told the boy that they had gone on before, and that those they had left would overtake them by and by.

Selecting six yoke of the best cattle, Mark helped the stricken mother from the wagon, and packing the bottom of the bed with provisions, spread the mattress and blankets over them. He then replaced her in the wagon with the children beside her, and they again moved on, leaving by the road many cattle and a large quantity of provisions, as well as the remainder of the dry goods with which the wagons had been burdened.

One of the cows would not be left behind. She



followed the wagon, bellowing as she proceeded, until Mark finally tied her to the tail-board with a long rope, and she walked along contentedly.

During the afternoon, Mrs. Kent exhibited symptoms of cholera, accompanied by extreme weakness. Mark proposed to halt, but she would not consent to it. Her mind seemed to wander, and she talked of the home she had left beyond the Missouri, and of that dreadful place in the wilderness where her husband's hands had been crossed in peace. The boy took charge of the babe in turn with Mark, and they fed it with crackers pulverized in sweetened water.

A little before sundown they drove into Ash Hollow and encamped for the night. While Dave was unyoking the cattle, Mark took the children from the wagon, and giving the babe to the boy, lighted a fire of buffalo chips and proceeded to prepare their simple supper, including a cup of tea for Mrs. Kent.

The supper being in readiness, Mark raised a portion of the wagon-cover to let in the soft twilight, and gently lifting the head of the mother, placed the cup to her lips. She took but a swallow of the liquid, and then sank back upon her hard pillow. He asked her if she had any pain, and she shook her head. This was strange. It could scarcely be the cholera, for she had felt but little pain all the afternoon, and no cramps.

After supper Mark returned to the wagon, and the mother whispered to him that she was dying.

"Don't talk so !" said Mark, in agony, as he thought of the three little children ; " don't talk so, or I shall go crazy !"

She sadly shook her head, and turning her eyes toward Mark, full of woe unutterable, continued :

" Alone in the wilderness ! Oh, God ! this is dreadful ! Promise a dying mother that you will not desert her children, and that if you reach the coast alive, you will see that they are sent back to my mother in Missouri. Dave will tell you where she lives. There is a little tin box in the wagon. You have seen it. Keep it for the children." And with these words, painfully delivered, her voice sank to an almost inaudible whisper.

Awed by the solemnity of the scene, Mark knelt before the dying mother, and raising his pale face and tearful eyes toward heaven, fervently exclaimed :

" Oh, if there be a God of pity as of love, let him stretch forth his hand to save this mother, or slay us all !"

" Do you promise ?" whispered the mother.

" Promise ?" repeated Mark, still kneeling. " Yes ! by my soul's salvation, yes !"

After a pause she whispered, so faintly that Mark bent his ear to catch the words :

" The children !—bring them !"

He sprang to the ground, and giving the babe to Dave, lifted the two other children into the wagon to kiss their mother good-night ; but she scarcely

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turned her head ; and to their " Good-night, mamma," no answer was returned. He lifted them down, and taking the babe in his arms, again stepped into the wagon ; kneeling, he touched the forehead of the mother. It was cold. He placed his hand against her heart. She was dead ! That she might not be defrauded even in death, he placed the lips of the little one to the cold face of the mother, and then silently crept down from the wagon. Suspecting the worst, Dave had left the fire and was standing before him. Taking him by the arm, Mark hoarsely whispered :

" She is gone ! spread the children's bed under the wagon, and when they have fallen asleep, start a grave somewhere near. I will walk the child to sleep, and be back before long !"

And Mark walked out hatless into the starlight with the child in his arms. He felt his reason wavering. Onward he walked, without knowing or caring whither. He saw lights flickering all around the valley. He approached and found trains near, and men digging graves. He stared at them wildly, but they scarcely noticed him or his strange burden. From one fire to another he wandered, and everywhere was heard the sound of pickaxe and shovel—everywhere were the dead being buried by pale and silent men, ghastly in the light of torches.

" This must be the valley of death," thought Mark, " and the gates of heaven and hell are near."

And he walked onward, caring but little through which of the portals he passed.

How his thoughtless steps were guided back to the spot was a mystery ; but an hour or two past midnight found him standing again beside the wagon, the child asleep upon his shoulder. The children were quietly at rest under the wagon, and Dave was asleep in a half-made grave in the sand.

The babe was laid beside the dead mother, when Mark aroused his companion, and work was vigorously resumed upon the grave. In the course of an hour the labor was completed, and the corpse was removed from the wagon and tenderly laid in the shallow pit. A blanket was placed over the face, and Mark turned his back as he shoveled the sand upon it.

The removal of the body from the wagon woke the little boy. The camp-fire had been re-fed to afford sufficient light for the burial, and he looked and saw they were carrying his mother out into the darkness. He crawled to his feet and followed. He saw them lower the body into the grave; and knew it would be covered with sand, just as others had been. He did not protest, but as the earth was shoveled into the grave, he implored Mark to bury him with his mother. It was a calm, earnest and solemn request in a child so young, and Mark felt that an unutterable grief alone could have inspired it.

Mark almost feared that his own reason was

wavering, and after the body had been covered the cattle were driven in and yoked, and just as daylight began to streak the east the children were quietly removed to beds in the wagon, and Ash Hollow with its horrors was left behind. The cattle were urged wildly forward until near noon, the sole object being to leave the dreaded spot as far eastward as possible; and then, where the grass was rank they were turned out, and after seeing that the children were fed, Mark left them in the charge of Dave and dropped into his blankets, worn out with fatigue and horror.

It was near sundown when Mark awoke. His mind was now clear, and he set himself vigorously to work to meet the great responsibility with which he found himself suddenly burdened. The babe was the cause of his greatest anxiety. The other children could subsist well enough upon the coarse fare of the camp; but he greatly feared for the little one, abruptly taken, as it was, from a mother's breast and deprived of a mother's care. It was already growing restless and feverish. The food with which it had been provided during the preceding forty-eight hours was evidently too harsh for the stomach, and more fitting nourishment must be devised.

Taking a cup, he went out among the cattle grazing near, and from the cow which had so stubbornly rebelled against being left behind he succeeded in stripping about half a pint of milk. A moment before he began to think they had been

deserted by Providence; but as he returned to camp with the milk, he rebuked himself for the impious thought. Adding to it a little sugar and water, it became a nourishing and palatable food for the little one, and Mark was delighted when he found it could be made to eat from a spoon.

After a substantial supper, the party sank to the long rest which they all so much needed, with no eye to watch over them save the sleepless eye of Him in the hollow of whose hand the ocean's surges beat, and the desert wastes of death lie whitening in the sun.

The next morning something more than half a pint of milk was obtained, and of a better quality than that secured the night before, and by carefully driving and pasturing the cow, the supply thenceforth became adequate to the wants of the little one.

And thus they journeyed slowly on, the children wondering that their parents halted not, and as often forgetting, in the tender care of Mark, that they had gone on before in search of greener fields and balmier air.

They had left behind more provisions than they should have done, and as their supplies began to run short, Mark's rifle added fresh meats from time to time. Up the valleys of the Platte and Sweet-water they toiled on; and over the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, where the cholera turned back from the afflicted trains before the breath of

the western ocean; and thence to the streams whose waters flow in sunless gorges into the Gulf of California.

From Bear River they followed the old road to Fort Hall. It describes the arc of a great circle, but Mark was afraid to venture upon the nearer and shorter routes.

Before reaching Fort Hall their provisions were nearly exhausted, their remaining supplies consisting of flour, beans, rice, and a few pounds of sugar, coffee and salt. Mark's rifle again became an important provider, and was carefully guarded lest some accident might render it useless.

Passing Fort Hall without halting, Mark moved the train down to the crossing of the Pont Neuf, a small tributary of Lewis River, and there encamped for the night. While Dave was preparing supper, consisting of bread, beans, and a small ground squirrel which had been killed that day, Mark heated and bent a large darning needle into the form of a fish-hook, and fastening a stout line to the eye, baited and threw it into the stream. He could see fish in the water, but succeeded, after an hour's patient angling, in hooking but a single one, a perch about six inches in length, which he cooked and gave to the children.

The cattle were becoming thin and foot-sore, and two yoke were abandoned at Soda Springs. The season was wearing away, with a long journey still before them, and Mark began to feel despondent.

As he sat on the wagon-tongue after supper with the babe in his arms, revolving in his mind the feasibility of making a boat of the wagon-bed, and floating down the Lewis and Columbia rivers, to the Pacific Ocean, in the frail craft, a large object approached in the twilight, and stopped within fifteen or twenty yards of him. At first he thought it the shade of an extinct mastodon or some other eocene monster; but fear had long since given place to desperation, and he walked slowly and curiously up to the object with the child still in his arms.

It did not move, and he placed his hand upon it and found it flesh and blood. Closer examination showed it to be an immense ox, black and white in color, and in excellent condition. He was profoundly astonished at the size and docility of the animal, and Dave's superstition would not allow him to approach the monster, standing out like a huge shadow in the twilight. The animal finally moved off and was lost in the darkness.

The next morning the ox was found among the cattle belonging to the train, and when the wagon rolled out of camp an hour later, he took up his line of march behind it. Mark attempted to drive the animal back, but he persisted in following, and paid no attention to the half-dozen or more trains that passed them during the day. The next morning found him still with the herd, and Mark began to regard him as a part of the train.



There was no mark of a yoke upon his neck, nor was there a blemish upon his huge body anywhere. The thought of bringing his strong limbs into service never occurred to Mark ; but as his presence caused neither anxiety nor trouble, there seemed to be no good reason why he should not be permitted to follow the wagon. And so he became a chattel of the little caravan, with the reservation that the owner could have him at any time by proving property.

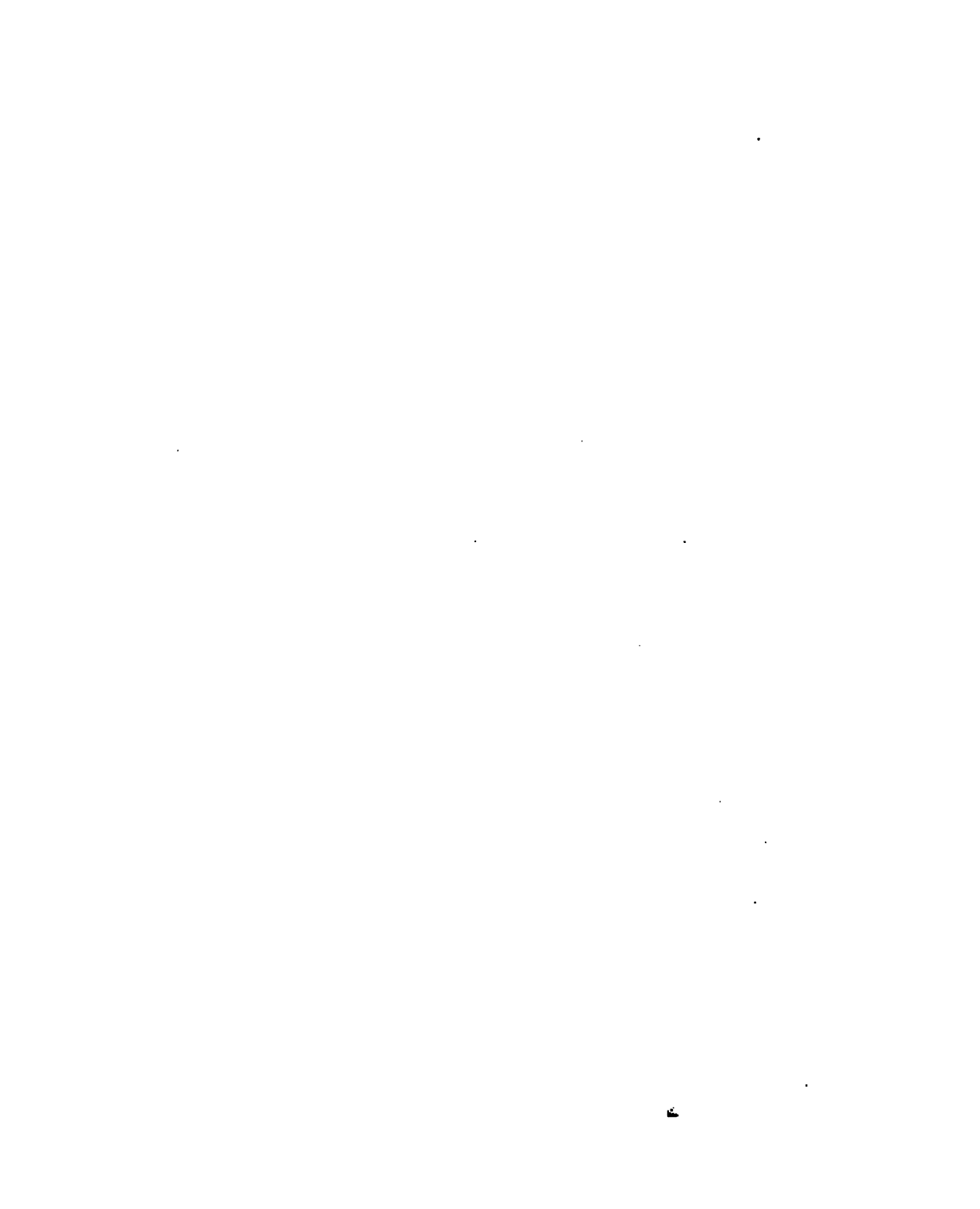
The kindness and intelligence of the animal were almost incredible, and before a week passed the little boy found amusement to his taste in being lifted to his broad back and riding there for hours together.

In weary stretches they reached the head-waters of the Humboldt river, then called the St. Mary's, and down the crooked and sluggish stream they followed the dusty road. On every side the vegetation was parched and uninviting, and from the carcasses of thousands of animals lining the highway the stench was almost unendurable.

Finally the sink of the Humboldt was gained, and beyond it stretched the desert. All the waters were now impregnated with salt and alkali, and the coarse and wiry grass that margined the shallow and stagnant lake was well-nigh poison to the half-famished cattle perishing daily in almost every train, or moving slowly and painfully on, with scarcely strength enough left to lift their following feet.



Photo-Electrotype Eng.



The desert is about forty miles in breadth, terminating westward in a belt of eight or nine miles of heavy sand. With such preparation as he was able to make, consisting of a quantity of grass and a few kegs of the best water to be obtained, Mark plunged into the arid waste about two o'clock in the afternoon, in order that he might strike the sand in the cool of the following morning. Before evening both sides of the road became strewn with the wrecks of wagons and camp equipage, while the number of carcasses increased with every mile. The still, hot air was stifling with the stench, and the gorged carrion birds circled lazily around just above the heads of the travelers.

About ten o'clock at night Mark halted for a three or four hours' rest. The cattle were given the grass provided and a little water, and a pot of coffee was boiled over a fire of wagon spokes. So weak were the most of the animals, that they ate their food lying down. The moon was shining, and many trains passed before midnight, the cattle leaning against each other for support, and occasionally dropping in their yokes. Some were turned out to die, while others, with barbarous but perhaps justifiable appliances, were forced to their feet and driven on.

Between twelve and one o'clock in the morning another start was made for the Carson river. For two hours or more the cattle moved quite briskly, but their pace soon slackened, and they had penetrated the

heavy sand of the last nine or ten miles but a short distance before they began to exhibit symptoms of complete prostration. At intervals of a few hundred yards they were allowed to stop and rest, and two or three of them invariably sank to the ground and with difficulty regained their feet.

Finally, in attempting to pass a sand-bound train of three or four wagons, five of them went down together, and no amount of lashing could raise them. Mark's stout heart sank within him. He was still five or six miles from water, and he did not see how he could overcome the dreadful barrier of intervening sand. The train beside him was in a condition quite as hopeless. It had made but little progress for two hours, and the captain of the party had ridden ahead on horseback to examine the road to the river, and returned with a few canteens of water.

While Mark was gloomily discussing the situation with some of the members of the neighboring train, the attention of one of them was directed to the huge ox standing a few yards from the wagon, his great eyes glistening in the moonlight. He was calmly surveying the scene, and showed no signs of fatigue. To the inquiry of whether he would work, Mark expressed a doubt, as he had never to his knowledge been yoked.

"Well, try him," suggested two or three of them, for a moment forgetting their own troubles in their sympathy for Mark and his little ones.

"All right," replied Mark; "but how?" The means were soon provided. From the coupling-pole of one of the wagons a large bow was procured, and after considerable shaving it was bent around the neck of the tractable monster and crowded into a yoke. He was mated with a large brindle ox which still showed some vitality, and placed at the tongue. So nearly was his body of the length of the tongue, that when standing in the yoke beside it, his hind parts were not more than twelve inches from the bed of the wagon.

Another yoke of cattle which still kept their feet were placed in the lead, and the remainder were un-yoked, preparatory to being driven behind by Dave. Everything being in readiness, the word was given, and, to the astonishment and delight of all, the huge animal, bending calmly to his work, raised the wagon from the sand in which the wheels were half imbedded, and then moved steadily forward with the power of a railway locomotive, dragging and pushing everything behind and before him. As they passed the train, turned again into the road, and stopped to enable Dave to bring up the loose cattle, Mark put his arms around the neck of the sturdy brute, and in the name of the orphans' God blessed him in a language which he could not understand. Could not? In after years Mark always thought he could.

And so the tireless animal, whose strength seemed to be without limit, went through the sandy

waste with the wagon behind him, the rest of the stock finding it difficult to keep pace with his strong and regular strides.

As they neared the Carson river, the cattle scented the moisture, and began to move with a rapidity which an hour before would have been thought impossible. Arriving at the stream after sunrise the loose stock rushed wildly into the water, and the cattle in the team were with difficulty restrained until they could be unyoked.

As the grazing in the valley was good, a rest of a week to recruit the stock was thought advisable. Mark spent the time in hunting, drying meats, and preparing for the journey up the valley and over the rugged summits of the Sierra Nevada mountains, visibly looming up among the clouds a hundred miles or more to the westward.

Greatly strengthened and refreshed, at the end of a week the train was ready to move up the valley of the Carson. September had come, and they were among the last of that long caravan which with the coming of the flowers had left the Missouri river for the journey of a continent. The most of the adventurers had already scaled the mountains beyond; but the grass was still green, and sweet waters were rippling down into the valley from all the surrounding hills. Mark was happy again, for the end of his journey appeared to be almost in sight as he gradually neared the foothills of the mountains.

But between him and the golden waters of the Pacific was a bold, rocky and precipitous barrier, white-crowned and terrible, which seemed to bar all further progress westward. Up the rugged side, and across the storm-swept summits, however, wound a narrow road, which looked like a gray stain as the eye followed it up among the clouds.

Reaching the base by a gradual rise through the valley of the Carson, Mark resolutely commenced the hazardous ascent of the main range, one cool September morning. Up through a rocky gorge, skirted with singing pines and almost choked with bowlders and detached masses of granite, the passage was attempted. Along the cañon for miles were heard the crash of breaking wagons, and the singing voices of men urging their weary animals upward.

Mark's progress was exceedingly slow, and to break the jar of the rocky passage, the bed of the wagon was partially filled with pine boughs. Over this rude cushion blankets were spread, upon which the children rode in tolerable security, the babe being entrusted to the care of the little boy. Steeper and more difficult became the ascent, until it seemed to Mark that he could go no further with the wagon.

He sat down to think. He listened to the dirge-like voice of the winds as they swept through the pines. He looked back, and the great eyes of the ox were bent upon him with a look of encourage-



ment. It was strange that he had not thought of it before ; but under the wagon was hanging the bow with which he had yoked the animal on the desert, and in ten minutes the obedient monster was again at the tongue. The wagon was a toy to his muscular touch, and upward he moved with it with a might as resistless in force as it was intelligent in direction.

And so they scaled the rugged passages of the summits without further delay or accident, and in a few days dropped down under the balmy autumn skies of the Sacramento Valley, and one evening ended their journey at Sutter's Fort. The cattle were turned out, as usual, and the next morning all were found, with one exception. The great ox was missing. Search was given for miles around, and every possible inquiry made ; but their great stout friend, their cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, was gone, and they never heard of him again.

When the search was over, Mark sat down and talked with Dave about the animal. He would have given much to see him just once more, for a strange fancy haunted him. Upon reflection, neither could remember that they had ever seen the animal eat. A feeling of awe crept over Mark, and his voice was tremulous as he said :

" Perhaps he was sent to us in the wilderness, Dave, for these children ! Let us search for him no more ! " And Mark reverently removed his hat as he added, " We will know more about it when we cross the dark water ! "

And now, as the recital of the adventures in the wilderness of our eccentric friend, Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs, has grown into chapters, we will take leave of him for the present, with the remark that in due time, through his instrumentality, the children were sent back to their relatives in Missouri, together with the tin box, which Mark had never opened, bearing the inscription, "Keep it for the children."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *Mark in the Gold Fields—Grant Bouton in California —His Introduction in Landers' Bar.*




THREE years are but a brief period, either in the lives of men or the histories of nations ; yet into the three years beginning with 1849 and ending in 1852, were crowded the events of a generation in California. Nor were they mementos alone to the fair land in which they occurred, or to the resolute men whose enterprise made them possible, and whose intelligence directed in the paths of peace the heterogeneous moral and physical forces suddenly thrown, like the stranding of a mighty fleet, on that coast of gold.

In the midst of a long night of financial calm, and stagnated values, abruptly rose against the horizon of the Far West a pillar of gold on a pedestal of silver. Higher and higher it mounted in the heavens, until the whole world beheld the shining wonder, and the hand of industry grew still in contemplating its unequaled splendors. Blind to all else, the plow was left in the furrow and the

hammer on the bench, and for months the sails of adventurers hastening toward the golden glory threw their shadows upon every sea, while lines of dust, flanked almost by lines of graves, from the Missouri river to the Sacramento, marked the desert highways over which fearless tens of thousands were wearily wending their way to the land of gold and sunshine beyond the frozen summits of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

There was no delusion in the glittering vision —no retreating mirage, which, with cruel finger beckons the traveler on to shade and fountain which vanish in the valley of death. It was the bright shadow of a still brighter reality. Soon the mountains of California swarmed with gold-hunters, and the harbor of San Francisco was filled with vessels of all classes and tonnage, the crews of which had deserted, taking with them, in many instances, the boats, with which to ascend the Sacramento or San Joaquin to the nearest point to the mines.

Gold was found to exist in all the streams of California flowing toward the Pacific, and in the most of their tributaries and ravines, and the immigration of 1850 exceeded that of 1849. Gold became as brass in the land for the abundance thereof, and the stream of treasure which poured eastward quickened the pulses of trade, revived industry, and enhanced property values everywhere in the United States, and to some extent in



Europe. The poor suddenly became rich, and the rich drifted back to poverty through the abandonment of the slow processes of accumulation for the hazardous ways of speculation. An era of extravagance was inaugurated, and a financial and social revolution followed, the effects of which are still visible wherever the English language is spoken.

In the midst of this rapid succession of events, from 1849 to 1852, let us see what changes occurred during that period to the few to whom the reader was kind enough to be introduced in the earlier chapters of this volume.

There would be more of romance, perhaps, were there somewhat less of truth, in this story of a few plain western people; yet since reality has provided a connected current of personal events so dramatic in their combinations, it is deemed better to follow them with reasonable fidelity.

The summer of 1852, at which date we beg leave to re-present our little group of acquaintances, found Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs in California, where we last left him; not, however, beside the crumbling walls of Sutter's Fort, but in the mountains, among the pines and gulches rich in gold.

As in the valley of the Miami, he had been whistling life away as a song among the golden sands of many of the streams from the Stanislaus to Feather river. The first year after his arrival in the mines he labored incessantly. He found a partner as in-

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dustrious as himself, and the first winter they worked as much of a rich bar on the Mokelumne river as the high water would permit, and the next summer wing-dammed a promising riffle below it. When the high water of 1850-51, which did not make its appearance until late in November, drove them from behind their dam, they were washing gravel which was yielding from one to ten dollars to the pan.

As the partner seemed to be satisfied with his share of their year's work, and was anxious to return to his New England home with a well-filled sack of dust, the claim was sold for a satisfactory price, and he joyfully turned his face eastward, with more wealth than he had ever dreamed of possessing.

Mark did not remain long on the bar after the departure of his companion. For the first time in his life he began to feel that he was alone in the world, and it was observed by his neighbors that the airs that at twilight went softly out from the flute that had been his solace for years, were sadder than they had ever heard from that instrument before.

He had gold—how much, he had scarcely taken the trouble to estimate, but certainly as much as he could well carry; but Mark felt there was something in the world worth having beside gold—something which gold could not purchase—something necessary to the happiness of a nature such as his—companionship of the heart.

He was a favorite with all who knew him, and while his unkempt and bearded associates admired his wit and outward gayety, and wept over the mellow notes of his flute as they gathered around his cabin door in the soft mountain twilight, they respected his sense of justice, and the broad charity which seemed to give him kinship with all mankind.

While he was laboring with pick and shovel from sunrise to sunset, stimulated by the large profits of his toil, and nightly sank to sleep almost as soon as his weary limbs touched his couch of pine leaves, he had little time to think ; but now that the hours hung idly on his hands ; now that a great task had been finished, leaving him little to do but to think, and the harpings of the winds through the leaves of the pines surrounding his cabin filled the autumn air with the song of approaching winter, Mark recollected that since his arrival in California he had seen none but strange faces, and had received no word of intelligence either from his old home, wherever it might have been, or from the next dearest place to him on earth. He also recollected—and this with a grief which neither song nor music could mitigate—that he had written more than once both to Grant and Martha Bouton, and had received no answer. For months the expressman had brought letters to others on the bar, but none to him ; and he began to feel that his existence in the world was a matter of indifference to all, even to the gentle and

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loving Martha, whose sweet face smiled upon him at midnight and cheered his hours of toil. He did not know that they had left Brinton, and that the letters he had mailed with so much care had found their way to the dead-letter office unopened, there to be hastily scanned and destroyed.

When Mark left the bar it was observed that he took with him but a few ounces of dust. At least he was burdened with no conspicuous amount. What he had done with his earnings of the previous year was known to himself alone ; yet those who gave the subject a thought knew that he must have buried or *cached* the gold either in tin cans or bottles, where it would be apt to remain undisturbed until he returned to remove it.

This was the usual disposition made of surplus gold dust by the pioneer miners of California. They buried it under the hearths of their cabins, at the bottoms of living springs, under the roots of trees which contained private marks for identification, and in the crannies of precipitous rocks above the reach of observation ; and it is within the limits of reason to assume that many millions of dollars thus secreted more than a quarter of a century ago, have been lost to the world through the deaths of their owners miles from their places of deposit. Occasionally, in cleaning out old springs, excavating for water ditches, or adventuring in out-of-the-way places in search of gold, these old *caches* are un-



earthed ; but the bulk of the treasure thus hidden will remain undiscovered to the end of time.

On leaving the bar, Mark visited Stockton, San Francisco, and Sacramento, at all of which places he inquired for letters, and examined the advertised lists as far back as he could find them. But there was no word for him, and with a reckless feeling of disappointment he again sought the shelter of the pines, and for more than a year roamed listlessly from camp to camp, sometimes mining, sometimes hunting, but oftener dreaming the hours away beside some noisy cataract, whose music seemed to silence the discord in his own heart. And thus dreaming, we will leave him for the present.

By the time Grant Bouton had completed his preparations for leaving Brinton, the season was somewhat too far advanced for an overland journey to California that year. This he discovered on reaching Cincinnati. But two things remained for him to do, either to remain another year, or proceed to New York and take passage around Cape Horn. He promptly decided in favor of the latter, and after a rough voyage of nearly five months, arrived in San Francisco late in the autumn of 1849.

As the rainy season had already set in, and little could be done in the mountains without previous preparation, Grant worked at his trade in Sacramento until the following spring, when, with a companion, he started for the Yuba river, locating at

Landers' Bar, where they purchased a claim from some parties who were about leaving for Gold Lake, and proceeded to take their first lessons in mining.

Grant was not familiar with gold coin ; in fact few who came from the Atlantic States at that time were ; and he willingly exchanged the miscellaneous assortment in his purse for something that would yield a commodity of genuine worth and positive value. The most of the coins were strange to him. They were of all sizes, colors and denominations. American coin was the standard, and any foreign coin, without regard to the alloy, was readily taken at the valuation of a United States coin, of which it was *about* the size and weight. The pieces commonly in circulation were genuine United States fives and tens ; the octagonal fifty, of which a few are still in existence ; the private coinage of Moffat, Schultze, Baldwin and others, without alloy ; Spanish, Mexican, Chilian and Peruvian doubloons ; English sovereigns ; twenty and forty-franc pieces, and Mormon eagles and half-eagles, of light weight, and bearing the motto of " Holiness to the Lord." The commercial dealings of the people of California had suddenly become so great that gold scales could not conveniently be used in the multiplicity of small transactions, and coins of all kinds were readily seized upon as a more rapid means of exchange ; and it was only in the mountains, where coin was still scarce, that a " pinch" of dust between

the thumb and fore-finger continued to be taken for a glass of whisky or a box of matches.

The claim which Grant and his partner purchased was one of the best on the bar, and they were almost bewildered at their success. From a single rocker their daily yield was from six to twelve ounces of dust, and before the waters of the succeeding winter drove them from the river, they had divided nearly two thousand ounces of gold, exclusive of their expenses of living.

The sale of the claim to Grant and his partner, for a nominal consideration, was one of the many instances in which miners at that time abandoned or transferred for a song productive and promising mining locations to follow a phantom. The Gold Lake delusion was one of the most baseless and cruel that ever excited the mining communities of the Pacific coast, and hundreds lost their lives in attempting to reach a mighty deposit of gold which existed only in the mind of a lunatic. It is presumed that the story originated with Tom Stoddard, an erratic miner in Butte county, who claimed to have become possessed of the secret through an incautious conversation in a tent adjoining his own. In substance the report was that, somewhere near the head-waters of the North Fork of Feather river, a lake had been discovered, the sands on the shores of which were pure gold, ready to be shoveled into sacks. As this accorded with the theory of many of the early miners in California, that in the mountains

existed mighty deposits from which the streams had been fed with gold, credence was given to the story by thousands, and the Spring of 1850 found a small army of adventurers facing the storms and unmelted snows in search of the lake of gold. Of course, the fabulous deposit was never found, but it was only after the region of its supposed existence had been pretty thoroughly explored that hope of its discovery was entirely relinquished.

Grant had developed into a man of unusual proportions. Over six feet in height, broad-shouldered and muscular, of the two or three hundred men on Landers' Bar there was not one who could handle so large a boulder or swing a sledge to so much purpose. As just as he was generous, as peaceful as he was strong, as brave as he was magnanimous, all loved the young Hercules, and the timely interposition of his stout arm had during the Summer prevented many a collision which might otherwise have been attended with fatal results.

Grant's introduction to the miners of Landers' Bar had been as abrupt as it was emphatic. In verifying the boundaries of the claim which he and his partner had purchased, he became acquainted with the owners of the adjoining claim above. They were an old man and his two sons, neither of the latter being of age; but they were stout, industrious lads, and their claim was among the richest on the bar. Immediately above them were a number of locations, held in common by a party of twelve or

fifteen Missourians. Their ground was not very productive, and they soon discovered that the most valuable part of it was along their lower boundary, within a few feet of where the old man and his sons were working. There they commenced operations, and everything went quietly along for some days. But the Missourians were envious of their more fortunate neighbors, and in the hope of driving them from their claim, finally entered upon a series of cowardly persecutions, among which were tumbling their waste bowlders and diverting their water into the adjoining claim.

These annoyances at length became so great as to compel a suspension of work by the little party, who were no match for their persecutors. That night the old man told his story to Grant, with a request that a miners' meeting might be called for the purpose of protecting him in his rights. Grant's eyes flashed with indignation as the old man finished the recital of his grievances; but he quietly replied:

"I think you can be protected without the trouble of calling the miners together. Go to work in the morning, as usual, and I will be there to take a hand in throwing bowlders should any one manifest a disposition to engage in the business."

"Any *one*!" said the old man; "why, there's a dozen of 'em!"

"Never mind the number," replied Grant. "One

in the right is always a majority in a conflict with wrong. Go to work. I will be there."

Early the next morning Grant quietly left the cabin while his partner was preparing breakfast. He met the old man and his sons as they were nervously going to their work, and together they entered the principal excavation of their claim, the bottom of which was found to be flooded with water and covered with bowlders of large size, which had evidently been rolled down from above.

For half an hour Grant employed himself in throwing the rocks out of the excavation, while the others were engaged in reducing the water. At the end of that time the Missourians began to make their appearance, and soon eight or ten of them were at work within a few feet of Grant and his companions. Grant's presence excited but little comment, as scarcely more than his head was observed over the embankment behind which he was working.

In a few minutes a stalwart Missourian, with a pick in his hand, walked menacingly toward the embankment, just as Grant had thrown over it a huge bowlder, and asked, with an air of insolence:

"What are you throwin' these rocks over on our claim for?"

"Because they belong there!" coolly replied Grant, tossing up another, which fell almost at the feet of the astounded Missourian.

"Well, I say they don't belong here, and they

shan't stay here!" savagely growled the other, as he rolled a large rock over the embankment.

"Take this in return, you uncivilized brute!" roared Grant, now thoroughly enraged; and seizing a rock as large as a man's head, he hurled it at the Missourian with the force of a catapult. It struck the savage full in the breast, and he fell stunned and bleeding to the ground.

A rush was made toward the fallen man by his companions, some of them producing knives and pistols as they advanced. Grant grasped a heavy pick-handle, which he had evidently placed for the emergency within convenient reach.

"We are in for it!" he said, addressing his companions. "Take your picks and follow me. See that I am not attacked in the back, and I will make short work of the ruffians or they shall of me!"

With this Grant sprang up the embankment with the force and agility of a panther, and stood facing the entire party. He was the picture of Hercules himself as, leaning upon his club, he looked scornfully down upon his shrinking adversaries.

"I am here to protect the owners of this claim, who seem to be unable to protect themselves!" and Grant advanced a step or two, until he was almost within striking distance of the party.

"What business is it of yours?" yelled one of the Missourians, suddenly opening fire upon Grant with an Allen's revolver.

Grant sprang forward, and with a crushing blow

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struck the weapon from the hand of his assailant. He was now in the midst of his enemies, who began to close in upon him, some with knives and others with pistols, which in the confusion they could not use without endangering the lives of their friends.

They had underrated the strength of the young giant. Now appreciating that the conflict had resolved itself into a struggle for life, like a whirlwind Grant charged upon his enemies. Wherever he turned with that terrible pick-handle, men went down with paralyzed arms and broken bones. Twice he was seized from behind, but he shook his assailants off like dew from a bison's mane, flinging one of them over the embankment among the rocks. Three or four pistol shots were fired, one of the bullets furrowing the fleshy part of Grant's left hand, and another entering the shoulder of one of his opponents.

All this was quick and desperate work, and in less than a minute the few who were not *hors du combat* had retreated beyond the reach of Grant's arm. By this time the old man and his sons, who had gone around the embankment instead of leaping over it, put in a hostile appearance, and a parley was sounded.

"We are willin' to call it quits if you are!" said one of the combatants, cautiously approaching Grant, who was binding up his wounded hand with a handkerchief. "I don't know much about this

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difficulty, for I only got back from Marysville last night; but I reckon the boys are wrong, and when the row commenced I pitched in without askin' any questions."

"Very well," replied Grant; "but it must be on condition that these men are not to be molested again in their work."

"All right, boss!" returned the Missourian, with undisguised respect for Grant's pluck and prowess. "I pledge you my word that they shan't be bothered any more by me, even if the boys are right, for I won't stay on a flat where a dozen yahoos aren't able to git away in a fair knock-down fight with one man and a pick-handle. But give us your hand, stranger," he continued; "you're a good one, or my name ain't Joe Braxton. I'd as soon attack a locomotive under a full head of steam!"

Grant smilingly shook the hand of the Missourian, who, he was satisfied, was in no way responsible for the lawless acts of his companions, and expressing a hope that they might, in the future, be friends, returned to his cabin, leaving the late beligerents to provide for their wounded.


The news of the unequal conflict soon spread to every cabin on the bar, and in spite of himself, Grant at once became a hero in the neighborhood. But the battle completely disrupted the Missouri company. Joe Braxton kept his word by leaving the bar the next day, declaring that he felt too greatly humiliated to look a full-grown man in the face.

Abandoning their claim, which seemed to be of no great value, the remainder of the company left as soon as they were able to travel, and peace reigned again on Landers' Bar.

During the winter spent at Sacramento, and the summer on the Bar, Grant had frequently heard from Martha, and through her, indirectly, from Lucy Brinton. He had sent her money from time to time, that she might feel less dependent in her new home, and in his letters had drawn pleasant pictures of the future, when he would return with wealth enough to make them both happy. He had not ventured to write to Lucy; but she had written to Martha immediately after his departure from Brinton, and had since continued a correspondence with her which seemed to be mutually agreeable.

Without assuming to feel any unusual interest in Grant, Lucy seldom closed a letter to Martha without inquiring when she had last heard from her brother, what he was doing, and when he expected to return. Thus, through his sister, was Grant kept pretty well apprised of what was occurring in Brinton.

In more than one of her letters to Grant, after his arrival in California, had Martha timidly inquired concerning Mark, that strange but genial human riddle who had played such pranks with her imagination, and set to beating the pulses of her young heart to melodies so full of sunshine. She wondered, and wondered still, whether Mark



had ever reached California, and thought it strange that Grant had never met him there, little dreaming that for months he had been vainly endeavoring to tell her by letter that he still lived and loved her.

Grant disposed of his interest in the claim on Landers' Bar to his partner and one of the men from whom they had purchased the location in the Spring. He had not an ounce of dust, but was a rollicking, good-natured sailor, and Grant made the terms so easy, that his partner advanced the money for his share of the purchase. The two partners of the sailor had started for Gold Lake on leaving the bar, but he had abandoned the undertaking and turned into the riotous byways of Sacramento, where he squandered a heavy sack of gold, and then returned on foot to the mountains. Although the expenditure was somewhat novel, the manner in which he disposed of the last of his dust was quite characteristic of the times. Sacramento was filled with gambling-houses, while the street corners swarmed with thimble-rig, prick-o'-the-loop and three-card-monte experts and their cappers. With his remaining ounce the sailor won forty or fifty more at a monte table. Diverted from the game by a temporary disturbance, caused by an attempt by one of the players to hack off the fingers of the dealer while in the act of taking in a bet about which there was some question, the sailor proceeded to a liquor store, where he purchased a basket of champagne, and next to a furniture

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establishment, where his last dollar went in the purchase of a set of parlor furniture, including a large and costly mirror. The wine and furniture, or as much of the latter as the owner wanted, were ordered to the front of his lodging-house, and under the branches of a neighboring oak he spread his banquet. The mirror was propped against the tree, the furniture was arranged in front of it, and the open basket of wine was placed upon the table surrounded with glasses. Seated upon the sofa in front of the mirror, with his rough cowhide boots luxuriously resting upon a cushioned chair, he drank the healths of the passers, and invited the whole world to join him, declaring that he was the captain of the craft, and not above taking a glass of grog with the crew. Filled with wine and tired of playing host, he finally smashed the mirror with a bottle, tipped over the table and began to break up the furniture, when he was stopped by the bystanders. Indignant at the interference, he staggered into the house, and throwing his roll of blankets over his shoulder, started for the mines on foot, leaving the furniture in the street.

Grant spent the most of the following winter in San Francisco. While there, watching the steady stream of treasure down the Sacramento and San Joaquin, the great ships and steamers constantly coming and going through the Golden Gate, the bustle of organizing enterprise, and the reckless waste of money over the gaming-tables which al-

most everywhere abounded, he believed that he beheld the foundations of a mighty city, and little persuasion was required to induce him to invest the bulk of his earnings in unimproved real property. In any event, he knew the investment to be safe, and with a light heart the melting snows of the Spring of 1851 found him again in the mountains, exploring the bars and gulches of the Middle Yuba.

And now let us note what changes were wrought in Brinton during the three years ending with the Autumn of 1852. From 1848 to 1852 there had been a very marked decline in the business prospects of the village. Much of the trade of the place had been diverted by neighboring business centers, and during the period referred to financial and social revolutions had occurred, affecting many of the people with whom the reader has been made acquainted.

John Brinton still occupied the old mansion, and continued in the mercantile business ; but his books were crowded with accounts which could not be collected, and his indebtedness in the Eastern markets betokened approaching embarrassment.

Dr. Bement was again relying upon his professional practice for support. A number of bad loans, together with an unfortunate speculation in wheat, in which Mr. Brinton was also interested, had well-nigh swept away his accumulations of years, and with somewhat more ostentation than

had been his wont, he moved around among his patients, and was ready to answer calls at any hour of the night, and at almost any distance from the village.

Orville Bement, after attending a medical school in Philadelphia for two years or more, suddenly discovered an inaptitude for the profession with the decrease in his quarterly allowances for personal expenses; and with his last remittance, together with small sums borrowed from his fellow-students, he took passage for San Francisco by steamer, early in the Autumn of 1851. He knew Grant Bouton was in California, and had somewhere heard of his success, and, envious of one whom he disliked, not more because of the wide differences in their tastes and dispositions than from a suspicion that Lucy Brinton regarded him with something more than a feeling of kindness, he determined to follow him.

A brief note to his father announced his approaching departure, and in a letter to Lucy he referred fervently to his changeless affection for her, and promised to return and claim her hand, in accordance with the desire of his own heart and the wishes of their parents, as soon as fortune smiled upon him in the land of gold.

Proceeding at once to Sacramento, and falling in with a number of disreputable associates, he spent the winter of 1851-2 in that city, procuring a livelihood by acting in the capacity of capper or stool

pigeon to three or four swindling gambling games. His gains in the nefarious business, supplemented in time by grosser felonies, were very considerable, for he was adroit and conscienceless ; but the earnings of the day were spent in the debaucheries of the night, and early in the spring of 1852, with two or three congenial companions whose pursuits were lawless, he started for the mines in search of wider and more varied fields of operation.

## CHAPTER IX.

*A Tragedy on Brady's Bar, and what Mark had to do with it.*



ABOUT thirty miles above the mouth of the North Fork of the American river, on the southern side, is Brady's Bar. At that point the stream dashes through a gloomy looking gorge, with now almost untrodden trails zig-zagging up the rocky and precipitous mountain sides. On the south side of the river the trail leads up to a wagon road passing along the dividing ridge between the North Fork and a tributary six or seven miles distant, while the trail, winding up from the north side of the stream, encounters at the summit the broader thoroughfares leading further eastward and over to the head-waters of Bear river.

Glancing down from the northern summit through the tops of the intervening pines and stunted cedars clinging to the fissures of the rocks, the stream looks like a thread of silver. At the lower end of the bar, which is covered with huge boulders and is scarcely more than a quarter of a



mile in length, the scanty waters of Brush creek ostentatiously leap into the stream from a mile or more of steep and noisy riffles, without perceptibly swelling its volume.

The bar, which had been exceedingly rich in spots, was pretty nearly exhausted of its gold in 1851, and in the summer of 1852 not more than half-a-dozen miners were working there, while a number of deserted log cabins, with unhinged clap-board doors and weather-rent chimney-tops, scattered here and there over the flat, told of busy and more prosperous times in the past on Brady's Bar.

Among the few miners remaining there at that time was a quiet but somewhat eccentric middle-aged man who had always been known on the bar as Uncle Tom, for the reason that, with a partner who had left for the Atlantic States some months before, he had been the first to introduce there that once popular mining implement, the long tom. As his claim, which was one of the best on the bar, was at the lower end of the flat, he was able to utilize the waters of Brush creek through the medium of a short ditch and a few yards of canvas hose.

The tom introduced by the old man was a very simple affair. The sides and bottom were in one piece, hewn with a common hand-axe from the body of a pine. The screen consisted of two united rocker sieves, and the riffle-box was made of thin and carefully hewn puncheons lined on the inside with canvas. A few days of use smoothed down

the rough and uneven surfaces, and then Uncle Tom and his partner could wash more gravel in a day than could be shaken through a dozen rockers.

Uncle Tom was a man of marked eccentricities and of more than ordinary intelligence, and at some time in his life his reading must have been extensive and varied, for he discoursed understandingly on almost every topic presented, and quoted liberally and with taste from the standard poets. He seldom visited his neighbors except when on business, but those who entered his cabin were always received with warmth and hospitality. His library consisted of a small pocket Bible and a convenient volume of statistics, weights and measurements, and when not employed with these in his leisure hours, he sat under a large yellow pine in front of the door, and amused himself with a family of lizards that ran fearlessly over his shoulders and ate from his hand.

Since the departure of his partner he had lived and labored alone. There was but little unworked ground of value remaining in the claim, but he was still making good wages, and seemed to be satisfied. As the partner left heavily laden with dust, it was surmised that Uncle Tom had a goodly supply of gold secreted somewhere in the neighborhood of his cabin; but, whatever may have been the amount, there was no one of his acquaintances who would not have been pleased to see it doubled in value.

A warm July afternoon, about the time here re-

ferred to, found Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs carefully descending the narrow and tortuous trail leading down the mountain south of Brady's Bar. He was clad in the ordinary garb of a miner, with a revolver belted around his waist, as was the custom in the early days of California, while over his shoulder, suspended from the end of a stout stick, were a roll of blankets and a leathern sachel.

He leisurely descended, occasionally stopping to take in a broader view of the magnificent scenery around him, until he reached a point on Brush Creek about two hundred yards above its mouth. Here he came upon a beautiful cascade, and immediately below it a cool thicket of laurel and manzanito, overshadowed by majestic pines. Throwing aside his burden, he bathed his face in the sparkling waters, and then sat down among the leaves to listen to the music of the mountain torrent.

Without any especial object in view, Mark had a few days before sold a claim four or five miles above Coloma, upon which he had at intervals worked during the Spring and thus far into the Summer, and was wandering listlessly northward across the mountains in search of new scenes and new faces. The thought that he was an uncared-for atom among the moving masses of life was ever with him, until his aims had become as purposeless as those of the wild bird flitting from limb to limb and listening to its own music.

Under the influence of the monotonous song of

the waters, Mark pulled his blankets under his head and fell asleep. When he awoke, to his astonishment the moonlight was shining in his face. He had expected to reach the Mountain Springs House that night, across the river and seven or eight miles beyond; but as the crossing was on a pine log at the upper end of the bar, and could be safely ventured only in daylight, he decided to descend to the flat and remain there until morning.

The trail led him past one of the deserted cabins on the bar, and after lighting a match and hastily inspecting the interior, he concluded that the best he could do was to take possession of it for the night. Lighting a small fire on the hearth, he discovered that the door was on its hinges, and that against the back side of the cabin an upper bunk had been left, partially filled with pine leaves.

These were better accommodations than he could have anticipated, and after partaking of a satisfactory supper of cold meat and bread, which his sachel liberally furnished, he closed the door, unrolled his blankets upon the leaves, tossed his sachel into the bunk for a pillow, and climbing up after it, sank to sleep just as the last flickering blaze had died out on the hearth. Some of the chinking had fallen out from between the logs, and an opening two or three feet in length by as many inches in width let in the night wind on the sleeper's face, but his slumber was all the sweeter for it.

Wonderful was the endurance of the pioneers of

the Pacific! Sleeping out in the open air, sometimes in the snow and oftener in the drizzling rain; working day after day up to their arm-pits in the cold waters of the mountains; frequently half clad and half starved; climbing the steep mountain sides under heavy burdens in the melting summer's sun, and toiling on snow-shoes through the winter's storm in search of food;—these were a few of the hardships encountered by the pioneer miners of California. They did not feel the effects then, but later the penalty came, and they may be seen to-day all over the coast with rheumatic limbs and shattered constitutions, the results of exposures a quarter of a century or more ago. Brave men! Complaint seldom escapes them. Heroically they are fulfilling their humble missions, and soon the last of them will have passed to that other golden land where love and light become eternal!

It was past midnight when Mark was aroused by a low but distinct conversation which seemed to be at his very ear. He raised on his elbow, at the same time reaching for his pistol, and cautiously peered through the opening between the logs. The moon was still high in the heavens, and within ten feet of him he could plainly distinguish three mounted men, in a suppressed but earnest conversation behind the cabin. Mark was not long in discovering their character and business.

"Well, I'm satisfied," said one of them, "that this is all we're goin' to git. There's near a hundred

ounces of it, I should judge by the weight, and I don't believe he has any secreted on the bar. If he has, this would have been with it."

"But I'm certain that he has," replied another, with great earnestness, "for his partner left for the States last Fall, with over thirty thousand dollars, and he hasn't been ten miles away from the bar since. What did he tell you about it when you agreed to spare his life?" continued the fellow, turning to the third member of the party.

"Why, he told me I'd find a description of the place where the dust was buried on the front fly-leaf of a little Bible on the table, and while you and Nosey were digging for the dust under the hearth, I tore out the only fly-leaf with a mark on it in the book, and here it is," said the speaker, holding up a scrap of paper, and lowering his voice almost to a whisper. "It seems to be a description of something, but I can't make head or tail of it. Strike a match, Nosey, and let me examine it a little more carefully."

The two dismounted, and three or four matches were produced and ignited in a bunch, by the light of which it was discovered that the penciled words on the paper were an unintelligible jumble, from which no shadow of information could be gathered.

The bright light shining in the faces of the men gave Mark an opportunity to examine them closely. One of them almost startled him with its familiarity. He was certain that he had seen the face before, but

could not at the moment tell exactly where or under what circumstances.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the one with the paper.

"What do I think of it?" replied the other; "why, I think it was a trick of the old man to save his life, and that there's nothing in it."

"It may be so," was the answer; "yet I'm sorry I finished him. If alive, it would not be too late to go back and choke an explanation out of him."

"He wouldn't be able to give you any," said Nosey, remounting; "and instead of tryin' to find a lot of buried dust, that I don't believe has been buried at all, we'd better be gittin' out of this cañon before daylight. We'll take the back track to the divide, drop down as far as the mouth of Crow creek, and ford the river there before sunrise."

"All right!" replied the other, leaping into his saddle, but not before he had carefully folded and deposited in an inside breast pocket of his coat the paper they had been examining. "All right," he repeated; "but before we start up the trail we'd better drop down and fire the cabin. Should the body burn up with it, so much the better."

This proposal seemed to meet with general favor, and the three started down the flat at a slow pace.

Horried at what he had seen and heard, and undecided as to his proper course under the circum-







From "The Electric Light" by W. G. M.

stances, Mark reflected for a few minutes, and then leaped from his bunk, seized his revolver, and cautiously opened the door. Should he alarm the miners at the upper end of the bar, how would he be able to convince them that he himself was not the murderer? This unpleasant thought presented itself, and he lowered the hammer of the pistol he had raised to fire.

He stepped to the bunk to draw on his boots, one of which he found only after igniting a match, and when he returned to the door heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on the mountain side, and discerned a bright light at the lower end of the bar. He then knew that the cabin had been fired, and that the murderers were making their escape up the trail.

He fired his revolver in the air, and at a rapid walk started in the direction of the light. When he reached the cabin the roof was all ablaze, and across the sill of the open door lay the blood-stained corpse of Uncle Tom. As the body was still warm, it was evident that the victim, with a spark of life remaining, had crawled to the door to escape the fire, and there died.

Mark hastily bore the body some distance from the cabin, and finding life extinct, returned to see what might be saved from the flames. On entering the cabin he found the smoke so dense as to be unable to discern anything beyond his reach. Groping around as long as he could retain his breath, his hand finally came in contact with a rough clap-

board table, which he seized, and, without any apparent reason except that he could find nothing else, dragged it through the door. As it was too large for the opening, it went over the door-sill a wreck, with Mark under it. His head coming in contact with a stick of wood, he was stunned for a moment. He regained his feet, however, just as the roof began to tumble in, and in rising his hand touched and he picked from the ground a small volume, which was probably on the table when he pulled it through the door.

Finding that nothing more could be saved, he dropped the little book into one of the breast pockets of his stout overshirt, and started up the bar, where he presumed some one might be found. He had proceeded but a short distance when he was met by three men, all of them armed, and of course somewhat excited. They had heard the report of his pistol, and were hastening down the flat in the direction of the burning cabin.

As they discovered Mark they halted for a moment. Then there was a clicking of pistols, and they cautiously advanced.

"Who's there?" exclaimed one, of them, loud enough to be heard.

"But one man," replied Mark; "don't be alarmed, or make a target of me, for there has been blood enough shed here to-night."

They approached, and Mark hastily related to them the story of what had occurred. He then led

them to the body of the murdered man, and pointed to it in silence. By the light of the burning cabin they at once recognized the features of their old neighbor. An examination showed a slight fracture of the skull by some sharp and heavy instrument, and two fatal knife wounds in the breast and side.

"You refer to him as Uncle Tom," said Mark, addressing one of the party who was wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his flannel shirt. "What was his real name?"

"I really don't know, stranger," was the reply. "We nearly all go by nick-names in this country, you know, and I've never known Uncle Tom by any other name."

"I think he told me once that his name was Benton," said another of the party; "but if we don't know him now we never will, for everything in the shape of a paper has probably gone with the cabin."

"No, not everything," hastily interrupted Mark, recollecting the book in his pocket. "In groping around in the smoke I got hold of a table, which I pulled through the door just before the roof fell in. I broke the table in getting it out; but this," he continued, taking the book from his pocket, "must have been on it, for I picked it up in front of the door immediately after."

All collected around Mark as he opened the book in the light of the burning cabin, and gazed curiously at the little volume.

"A Bible," said Mark, running the leaves be-

tween his fingers. "It ought to contain the name of some one, but every fly-leaf is gone ;" and with a feeling of disappointment he passed the book to the others, who in turn examined it.

"It is strange," said one of them, returning the book to Mark, "that every blank leaf should have been torn out."

"Not very," returned Mark, replacing the volume in his pocket, and recalling the conversation behind the cabin in which he had sought shelter for the night. "No, not very strange to me. The leaves were torn out by one of the gang in the belief that they somewhere contained a memorandum of the location of buried treasure ; but nothing found of that character seemed to be of any service to them, and they left in the belief that they had secured all the gold their victim really possessed."

"How much do you think they got ?" inquired one of the party.

"From the conversation I overheard," replied Mark, "I should say not to exceed a hundred ounces. I recollect such an amount was mentioned by one of them, who roughly estimated it by the apparent weight."

"Then they didn't get one-tenth of the old man's dust," emphatically declared the other. "The bulk of it is still buried around these cañons somewhere, and it will be an accident if it's ever found."

After a general interchange of opinion on the subject, and a decision that it would be useless, with

but two animals on the bar, and both of them donkeys, to attempt to follow the murderers, the body of Uncle Tom was reverently borne to the cabin where Mark had spread his blankets for the night, and there washed and laid out on the door taken from its hinges for that purpose.

The number of watchers was increased to seven by the arrival of three others from the upper end of the flat, and during the remainder of the night they sat around the cabin, discussing the virtues and wisdom of Uncle Tom, and invoking the vengeance of heaven upon his murderers.

At daylight the next morning they dug a grave under the pine where Uncle Tom had dreamed through the twilight of more than two summers, and just as the sun looked into the cañon from the eastern hills, they lowered the body into its narrow home. A rough coffin had been provided from the tom and sluice-boxes on the old man's claim, and before the earth was shoveled in upon it, Mark reverently removed his hat, as did his bearded and kind-hearted companions, and taking the Bible from his pocket, in a voice tremulous with emotion solemnly read from its pages :

"Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

"He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down ; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

"And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee ?

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ?  
Not one.

"Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee ; thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass ;

"Turn from him, that he may rest, that he may accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.

"Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground ;

"Yet with the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.

"But man dieth and wasteth away ; man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?

"As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up :

"So man lieth down, and riseth not ; till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep."

There was not a dry eye among them all as Mark closed the volume. Then one of them, to whom such invocation seemed not to be new, stepped forward, and kneeling beside the grave said, "Let us pray !"

And with bowed heads they all knelt, and such a prayer went up for the peace of the dead as had never been heard on Brady's Bar before.

At the head of the grave was placed a board, on

which was penciled the name of "Uncle Tom," and under it the story of his death, and the old man was left alone by the ashes of his cabin.

Mark was invited to breakfast with his new acquaintances, who for convenience occupied together a large log cabin at the upper end of the flat. There were vacant cabins on the bar, but they were all of one company, and their earnings were divided, and each week in turn one of them became the cook of the party.

While the meal was being prepared, two or three pleasant reminiscences of Uncle Tom were related, all showing him to have been a man of great goodness and humanity. For instance, two winters before, when the storms had closed the trails leading from the bar, and famine rations began to be served out, he divided his last pound of flour and bacon, and then nearly lost his life in seeking relief for the sufferers, on snow-shoes. No one had ever appealed to him in vain for assistance, and many in the past who had visited the bar without means, left with a few ounces of Uncle Tom's dust to enable them to search for better locations.

There was no ostentation, either in his advice or his charities. They were the promptings of a heart full of gentleness and sympathy; and it need not be wondered that the eyes of those who spoke of their kind old neighbor filled with tears when they thought of his cruel slaughter beside his own hearth. In some of his ways he was harmlessly eccentric,



and on many subjects his thoughts ran into dreamy channels; but, as all of them thought, and one of them remarked, "a better man never spread his blankets under the pines."

After breakfast, with his mind bewildered with the events of the preceding night, Mark crossed the river, and slowly ascended the trail, leaving behind him a promise to forward to the sheriff of the county, at the nearest practicable point of communication, an account of the robbery and murder, with a description of the malefactors. This promise he faithfully fulfilled before the close of the day, and then continued his journey northward, but seldom observing a missing chink between the logs of a cabin without recalling that dreadful night on Brady's Bar.

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## CHAPTER X.

*Forest City.—Grant Meets an Old Acquaintance.—A  
Fight at a Gambling Table.—Braxton's Bar.*



FOREST CITY, between the north and middle forks of the Yuba river, was a small mining camp in 1852. It had sprung up suddenly under the inspiration of a line of rich gold deposits in the immediate vicinity, and its streets, shaded in many places by white and yellow pines, were beginning to be pretty plentifully besprinkled with drinking and gaming saloons.

The growth of early mining villages in California was peculiar, and almost undeviating in character. A half-dozen miners' cabins gave the settlement a name, and the christening ceremonies usually consisted of a liberal as well as a very general indulgence in fiery and untamed liquors of various kinds until past midnight, followed by quite as liberal a dispensation of splitting headaches the next morning. The main street was then laid out in conformity with any three cabins which chanced to be nearest in line along the mainly traveled thorough

fare, whether wagon-road or trail. The next improvement was apt to be a shake or clap-board one-story structure, with a rude bar for the sale of liquors in front, and a small assortment of provisions and other miner's supplies in the rear, with a few stools and benches added, and a rough card-table covered with a blue blanket, and the place was ready for business. As the residences increased in number, next followed another drinking-saloon; then a boarding-house, where liquors were retailed; then a gambling-house with a bar attached; then a blacksmith shop; then two more stores of miner's supplies; then a cigar and tobacco store, including a small supply of cutlery, stationery, newspapers and periodicals, and perhaps a few jars of candies; then a meat market; then a clothing-store; then an express office, where gold dust was purchased, and something of a banking and exchange business was done; then a regular hotel, to which was removed the stage-office; then a barber's shop; then five or six more drinking saloons; then a dancing-hall, or hurdy-gurdy house; then a drug-store, in which was located the first post-office; then a livery and feed stable; then a restaurant or two; then three more clothing stores; then a bakery, with a restaurant attachment; and, finally, as families came, bringing with them the calm of the fireside, and the influences of refinement, a school-house and church, and then a printing-office, completed the first epoch in the growth of the early California mining town.

The Spring of 1852 found Grant Bouton in Forest City. It had but just taken upon itself the dignity of a distinct locality, but was full of youthful bustle. He arrived in the Marysville stage about sundown, and tossing his blankets behind the bar of the boarding-house in which he had secured lodgings, rambled out after supper for a general survey of the lively little village to which favorable report had directed him.

He was clad like the most of the miners around him, and his face was covered with the first soft beard of manhood. It was dark brown and two or three inches in length. He carried no weapon, and his broad shoulders and frank, handsome face drew to him a second glance from the most of those he passed.

Hoping to meet some familiar face, he strolled leisurely into a large drinking saloon, in the back part of which were three or four gaming tables. The room was brilliantly lighted, and crowds of noisy but good-natured miners, many with knives and revolvers strapped around them, thronged the bar and tables, some of them drinking, some discussing the latest gold discoveries in the neighborhood, some betting at the games, and others idly watching the cards as they came from the faro-box or the hand of monte-dealer, or the ball of the roulette wheel, as, following the cry of "All down—no more!" it traveled its little journey, and settled at last upon an unexpected number.

The faro-table was crowded with betters, some standing and others sitting, and for a moment, as he had frequently through idle curiosity done before, Grant stood silently watching the game over the shoulders of the players. Suddenly a few sharp words showed that two of the players were claiming the same bet on one of the cards, which had won three times in succession, and amounted at last to eight or ten ounces. Disputes over cards were sometimes very summarily settled in the early mining days. It was a word and a blow, and the blow was very apt to come first. Hence, after a few words had passed between the parties, men drew back from the table and began to look for avenues of escape should any shooting occur.

"Settle it some way," said the dealer, leaning back in his chair, "and let the game go on!"

"Well, I'll settle it mighty quick. It was my bet, and you moved it from the six!" exclaimed one of them, savagely, reaching for the checks. He was a large man, with the appearance more of a desperado than a miner, and was under the influence of liquor.

"I will leave it to the look-out," said the other, mildly; but that worthy did not relish the idea of becoming a party in the fight which seemed to be imminent, and therefore prudently declared that he did not observe who had made the original bet, nor could he pretend to decide whether or not the checks had been moved from the six. He probably knew

well enough to whom the checks belonged, but did not like the looks of one of the claimants.

"Well, then, I will leave it to any bystander who knows," continued the player, glancing around him. "How was it?" he inquired, addressing a substantial-looking man who had been watching the game over his shoulder.

"It's no affair of mine," said the person addressed, "and I'd rather not mix up in it."

"Do you know?" inquired the man who had appealed to him.

"Yes, I *know*!" was the emphatic reply.

"Are you afraid to tell?" interposed the one who had reached for and partially moved the checks. There was a spirit of insult and menace in the inquiry which brought the hot blood to the cheek of the bystander, and he promptly replied:

"I'm afraid of nothing that walks on two legs, and I reckon you don't go on four! Since you want my decision, you shall have it. The bet don't belong to you. I watched this man make it, and it has won three times without bein' moved!"

"Well, he won't get it unless he's a better man than I am!" roared the other, putting the checks in his pocket; "and I believe you're a liar!" With this he drew a heavy navy revolver and rose to his feet.

Knives and pistols were drawn around the table in a moment, and all was excitement, as the man against whom the decision had been given was

known to be a desperate character and was generally feared. In the midst of the tumult he cocked and aimed his pistol at the umpire, who had drawn a knife and stood in an attitude of defense, and with the howl of "Take that!" pulled the trigger.

Quick as thought a strong hand had at the perilous moment grasped the wrist of the would-be assassin, and the bullet went upward and lodged in the roof. It was the hand of Grant Bouton, and so terrible was the grip that the pistol fell to the floor.

With a howl of rage the ruffian tore himself from the grasp of Grant, and attempted to draw another weapon; but the sturdy young blacksmith seized and crushed him to the floor as if he had been a child.

"Let me at him!" exclaimed the umpire, springing toward the fallen man with upraised knife. "Arm him with a cannon and let me at him, and he'll never attempt to murder another man!"

"No!" said Grant, firmly, throwing his body forward as a protection to the man at his feet, who lay there awe-stricken at the prodigious strength of his adversary.

"And why not?" roared the umpire, with his knife almost at Grant's throat. "He tried to murder me, and let us have it out at any game he's best at! Because he's killed two or three men, he thinks he's chief of this clearin', but he can't get away with one side of me! Why don't you give me a chance?" And he grasped Grant roughly by the shoulder and

attempted to push him aside ; but the huge body of the blacksmith scarcely swayed under the assault.

Grant removed the hand from his shoulder, and then coolly replied :

"Because Joe Braxton is too brave a man to become a murderer !"

"Just as you say," said Joe, replacing his knife, with a half-bewildered stare at Grant. "I know you now, and by the teeth of my grandmother, you're chief ! If they don't believe, let 'em step on your corns, and I'll bile in as a skirmisher and lug off the dead !"

The ruffian rose to his feet, but Grant's hand was still upon him as he looked him calmly in the face and said :

"You are not cool enough just yet to be trusted with weapons. Give me such as you have."

The man, with a dazed look, produced a knife and single barreled pistol, which, with the revolver upon the floor, Grant handed to the dealer. He then quietly turned, and without a word walked out of the saloon. All eyes followed him, with the expressions of "He's a whale !" "He's a good one !" "He'll do to tie to !" and the inquiries of "Who is he ?" "Where did he come from ?" and "When did he get here ?"

All these questions remained unanswered, of course, and Grant walked as slowly and calmly toward his lodging-house as if nothing unusual had occurred. He had scarcely reached the door before



he was met by Joe, who had followed him from the gambling-house, without waiting to learn how far his arbitration had in the end been respected, although he afterwards learned that the bully had sullenly turned over the checks to the rightful owner, and recovered his weapons after a promise that he would not attempt to use them. He remained in and around Forest City for some time, but his encounter with Grant humiliated him, and he was thereafter much less aggressive.

Joe Braxton was a rough but kind-hearted and intelligent child of the West. Although but thirty years of age, he had been a trapper in the Rocky Mountains and a trader at Santa Fé, and was able to distinguish a Sioux from a Comanche war-whoop. Lacking neither courage nor magnanimity, he was quite as apt to be unjust where it incurred a great danger, as he was to be just without peril. From boyhood his life had been an almost uninterrupted career of excitement and danger, and he had learned to love them both. He had a fine, handsome face, and in dress affected the frontiersman more than the miner. He was prepared to give his last dollar to a friend and his last bullet to his enemy, and to die blessing the one and fighting the other. Naturally humane and generous himself, he respected Grant's integrity and sense of justice, and admired beyond expression his strength and courage, no less than his splendid equipoise in emergencies of danger, and such was his confidence in him, that he

would have followed him unquestioned into the very jaws of death. His greeting, therefore, was as genuine as it was cordial, as he extended his hand and said :

"I'm mighty glad to see you, my boy ! I owe you my life, and should like to do something to show you that I'm not ungrateful !"

"You owe me nothing, Joe, but your good-will," replied Grant, warmly grasping the hand of the Missourian. "The fellow would have been just as likely to kill some one else as yourself had I not disarmed him."

"That may be," returned Joe ; and there was a merry twinkle in his eye as he continued ; "but Jehu ! how you could have gone through that crowd with a pick-handle !"

Grant smiled at this allusion to his pick-handle battle on Landers' Bar, as he replied :

"I am handiest with that implement in a gravel bank, Joe, though in emergencies I have discovered that it may be used for other purposes."

"Then I want you for a partner," said Joe, "for I happen to know exactly how handy you are with it in a red-hot skirmish."

"I know what you mean, Joe," replied Grant, pleasantly ; "but we will forget that."

"You may forget it," returned Joe, "but I shall remember it until I forget where I was born. By the Lord ! but you went through us like a hurricane ! I thought you was fifteen feet high, and your

pick-handle the butt-end of a saplin'. If I didn't I'm a squaw !"

"Never mind that," said Grant. "Now, tell me what you are doing here, and what the chances are for a foot-loose and energetic prospector to get hold of something in this neighborhood that will yield him a few thousands before the snow falls."

"A few thousands !" repeated Joe ; "a few thousands ! Now, that's the way I like to hear a man talk. There's nothing picayunish about it. It sounds as if a feller wanted to do something in this country. You're not huntin' half-ounce diggin's, nor I either. I'm after punkins, not huckleberries."

"While I am not very rich, I am not the poorest man in the world, Joe," said Grant, modestly, "and do not feel like contenting myself with bare wages. In fact I can't afford it."

"We're just alike, except that I *can* afford it, but won't ! Now, see here, my boy," continued Joe, lowering his voice and glancing around to satisfy himself that they were not overheard ; "the chances are first rate, and you're just the chap I'm lookin' for. I've discovered a little nook of a bar down on the Yuba, not many miles from here, that I believe is as rich as cream. It's a little swag in the cañon that hundreds have probably passed without noticing ; but if it's what I take it to be—and I've prospected it a little—there's enough in it for both of us."

"How did you happen to find it?" inquired Grant, beginning to feel interested.

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Joe, taking his companion by the arm and leading him a little distance from the house. "In prospectin' on the river, not long ago, I dropped down to the place just after a party of Chinamen had left it. They had dug three or four holes along the flat, and found nothing. The last they put down was at the lower end of the bar; but after sinking about four feet in wash and shale, they struck a boulder or two, which they took for the bed-rock, and not finding more than a color, packed up their traps and moved down the river. I reached the bar just as they were leavin' it, and concluded to see what they had been doin'. So I walked down and took a look at the last hole they had dug before it had time to fill with water. A little bailin' brought me to the bowlders. They did not look like bed-rock to me, and after pryin' round a while with my crevicin'-bar, I managed to loosen 'em and throw 'em out. The biggest one was lyin' on a bed of gravel. I dug down and washed out two or three pans of it."

"Well, what did you find?" inquired Grant, after a pause.

"What did I find?" continued Joe, slowly. "Well, I don't just remember how much. But I reckon there might be considerable gravel of the same kind under the wash, and thought it best to throw a few

bowlders into the hole and say nothing about it till I got ready to go back."

"I am thankful for your proposal, Joe, whether there is anything there or not," said Grant, "and whenever you are ready we will drop down and give it a thorough examination "

Arrangements were made that evening, and the next morning, with a donkey packed with mining implements and a small supply of provisions, Grant and Joe threw their blankets over their shoulders, and started for Braxton's Bar, on the Middle Yuba, for that was the name by which the little place was subsequently known.

The skies were clear, a cool breeze greeted them from the eastward peaks, and the air was filled with the incense of leaf and blossom. They were young, strong, and hopeful, and toil was as painless to their limbs as was the thought of danger or suffering to their hearts. Nowhere has hope ever built castles so royal as in the hearts of the early gold-seekers of California, for to them the possibilities were limitless. The untrodden hills were a land of dreams, the very home of romance, with fortune beckoning every heart to the fruition of its wildest hopes in life. How many of them were ever realized? Look around at the graves under the pines, and the wrecks by the wayside; at the sunken eyes and frozen hearts in the cities, and the gray hairs and feeble steps in the hills. Let us not make the estimate now !

Crossing Kanaka Creek, they passed through Chipp's Flat, and Minnesota, and then followed the steep and tortuous trail down to German Bar, on the Middle Yuba. But few miners were at work there at that time, for it was not until the year following that it became a mining camp of importance, and then only for one or two seasons.

The bed and bars of the middle Yuba for many miles above and below German Bar were never noted for their richness, although occasional deposits of great value were found by the earlier prospectors. The poverty of the stream was in a measure compensated for, however, and to an extent explained, by the splendid products of many of its ravines and elevated flats.

It was therefore with some misgivings that Grant followed his companion up the stream from German Bar. The trail was exceedingly rough in places, passing the most of the way over narrow and uninviting bars and jutting points above them.

After a journey of three or four miles, an abrupt bend in the narrow stream brought them to the mouth of a small ravine, the wash from which during the rainy seasons of centuries had gradually crowded the waters of the river against the precipitous cliffs of the opposite side.

A narrow trail wound up the ravine, intersecting at the summit a wagon-road leading down to Minnesota. Wherever the soil permitted, heavy growths of pine and cedar lined the sides of the

ravine as well as the banks of the river, and the spot seemed to be one of unusual seclusion.

"Well, here's the place," exclaimed Joe, halting the donkey under a pine at the upper side of the small flat, and dropping his blankets. "This spot is smooth and level enough for a campin'-ground, and the jack can find good pickin' up the ravine."

While he was removing the heavy burden from the back of the donkey, Grant, relieved of his blankets, was taking a general survey of the surroundings.

"What do you think of it, pard?" inquired Joe, throwing the pack-saddle under the tree, turning the head of the animal toward the ravine, and with a kick starting him in that direction. "I don't see any churches or school-houses around here, or any saloons and gamblin'-houses, or any mule teams, or any whoopin' and hollerin', or any tremenjus business excitement; but it's a nice, quiet place, where we won't be apt to be disturbed nights unless we have a land-slide or a grizzly gits to foolin' round the flour-sack."

"It is certainly quiet enough, Joe," replied Grant. "It is just such a place as a devout soul would seek for religious meditation, or a thief to elude pursuit; but I cannot say that is just the spot where I should expect to find a very large amount of gold."

"Just so!" exclaimed Joe. "Well, we'll take a bite of bread and bacon, for I'm as hungry as a

Presbyterian graveyard, and then do a little prospectin'. Perhaps there isn't any gold here; and then, again, perhaps there is; and it may be that hundreds of prospectors have walked over this little patch without stickin' a pick in it, because it didn't happen to look just right."

"Well," said Grant, cheerfully, "we will soon test the matter, and if we find nothing I shall not be greatly disappointed."

"But I shall," returned Joe, "for I'm not exactly guessin' at the conundrum. I've shook out a few pans of dirt in this neighborhood, and I'll tell you where I got it pretty soon. Some people think they can see right into a mountain, but in my opinion nobody can see very far beyond the end of the pick he's diggin' with. I don't pretend to be smarter than the general run, but if I don't hunt you up something more than a color, I'll eat that jack, ears and all, and if you're particular I'll throw in the pack-saddle."

"I will forgive you the horrible lunch," said Grant, "no matter what may be the result, unless you will allow me to divide it with you."

"No, sir!" responded Joe, emphatically. "I'll divide nothing with you except the gold we may find here, or the disappointment if we don't find any. Besides, you arn't used to that sort of grub, and I am. Why, I lived for two weeks on mule meat in the Black Hills, and for eight or ten days had nothing to eat but horned toads and lizards



down in the Santa Fé country. You don't know what it is to be hungry. To be *real* hungry means that a fellow wants to tear the heart out of a wolf and eat it before it gits cold."

After a hearty lunch and an hour or two of rest, with pick, pans and shovel Grant followed his companion to the lower end of the bar, where, near the water's edge, they found an excavation, which had originally been four or five feet in depth, but was now partially filled with water and bowlders.

"Whose work is this?" inquired Grant.

"Mine and the Chinaman's," replied Joe. "My part of it, which you will find under the bowlders, was done with these little hands about two weeks ago."

"What did you find at the bottom?" returned Grant.

"A good strong color," Joe answered evasively. "But let's get out the water and bowlders, and see what's under 'em."

Both stepped into the hole, and in a few minutes, through a vigorous use of the pans, it was comparatively free from water, although the sipage from the side nearest the river was considerable. The loose rocks were then removed, together with a quantity of wash, when Grant observed that, after passing through three or four feet of what seemed to be a deposit from the ravine, a fine bed of compact gravel was encountered. It was plain that the gravel was a part of the old bed of the river, from

which the waters had been slowly crowded by annual deposits from the ravine, consisting of shale, clay, decomposed vegetation and quartz.

After penetrating the gravel about eighteen inches, a pan was filled from the bottom. Grant sprang from the hole, and Joe passed up to him the heavy pan heaped with sand and gravel, and then sat down on a rock to await the result of the washing. It was all of fifteen minutes before Grant returned from the river. He had evidently washed the gravel carefully, and it was panned down close enough to determine the character of the prospect.

"Did you find anything?" inquired Joe, looking up at Grant with half-closed eyes, as he stood at the edge of the hole curiously fingering something in the pan.

"How much did you expect me to find?" replied Grant, attempting to look disappointed, but utterly failing.

"Oh, a cent or two," returned Joe, carelessly. "This don't seem to be just the place to look for gold." There was a little good-natured malice in this last remark, which evidently referred to Grant's first estimate of the locality.

"You are right, Joe," said Grant, frankly. "I find I have considerable to learn about mining yet. I did not think about the old bed of this sharp bend being under the wash;" and he stooped and handed the pan to Joe.

"A bare color! just my luck!" exclaimed Joe,

running his fore-finger through the mingled gold and black sand. "I was afraid of something of the kind! I should say this wouldn't clean up more than two or three ounces. We can't afford to hang around a claim that won't prospect better than that! We'd just as well take a scoot up the river, and see if we can't find something that'll pay!" And then, unable to restrain his joy—for the prospect largely exceeded his expectations—he passed the pan back to Grant, and leaping out of the hole at a single bound, sent a regular Comanche war-whoop echoing through the hills.

It was difficult for either of them to remain calm, for the pan contained between two and three ounces of fine river gold, and the gravel was taken at random from the bottom of the pit, and evidently some distance from the bed-rock.

"Whoo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!" rang out again from Joe's capacious lungs. "By the toe of Moses, we'll pack that jack with spelter before the water rises!"

"Well," returned Grant scarcely less excited than his companion, "I think we have done work enough here for to-day. Now let us see about providing a place to live in, for the chances are that we may remain for some time in this out-of-the-way place, which I now formally christen Braxton's Bar!"

"There's nothing in a name," said Joe, modestly, "and if the bar turns out all right, we can easily change it."

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in



Photo Electrotype of original.



looking for trees suitable for building purposes and selecting a site for a cabin. They talked until past midnight of how the claim should be opened and worked, and of its possible extent and uniformity of yield, and once during the night Joe woke his companion to get his opinion of the probable depth of the gravel in the old channel.

The next day, while Grant was grading a place for a cabin, Joe went over to Minnesota by the ravine trail, and returned in the afternoon with a donkey-load of hardware and miscellaneous articles required in the construction of a cabin, and the opening of the claim.

As both were handy with the axe and skilled in the ways of the frontier, in a few days a commodious and comfortable log-cabin adorned Braxton's Bar. They split shingles for the roof, and made shakes for the door and bunk bottoms. And they made two or three stools and benches, and a large dining-table, and put up shelves around the cabin, in convenient places. Their fire-place was broad and substantial, and the chimney strong enough for all weather. They filled their bunks with leaves and grass, hung an old check shirt at the opening left for a window, removed their provisions to a spare bunk to keep them from the ground, and then cooked their first meal in the cabin and considered themselves at home.

It was at first thought advisable to employ two or three men on the claim, and with that view the

cabin was made larger than was really necessary for their own accommodation ; but it was finally decided that it would be more prudent to first ascertain something of the extent and value of the deposit. A large rocker of the "grizzly" pattern was procured, and as the flow of water below the level of the stream rendered the presence of both of them necessary in the claim, they adopted the plan of taking out the gravel for three or four days continuously, and then packing it to the river and washing it. There was no deception in their first prospect, and the yield on the bed-rock, which was found on an average of five or six feet from the top of the gravel, was enormous.

Report soon pointed out the rich deposit, and the bar was visited by several prospecting parties ; but as nothing of value could be found at the upper end of the little flat, which still remained unclaimed, it became manifest that the discoverers had fallen upon a rich and narrow streak in the old channel, which would soon be exhausted, and in a short time they were left alone to their labors.

By turns they frequently visited the neighboring towns, four or five miles distant, for letters and supplies ; but they kept their own counsel and worked with a will, and their hands were seldom idle while the daylight lasted.

And thus, in that secluded spot, passed away with them the long days of Spring and better part of Summer.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *Orville Bement and His Victim—His Meeting with Grant—A Council of Cut-throats.*



IN the Autumn of 1850 Abram Newland, who had been for many years a substantial farmer in Southern Iowa, arrived in Sacramento, California, after a weary journey of over four months from Council Bluffs across the continent. His family consisted of his good wife Esther, and an only child, Jennie, who was just reaching womanhood.

His entire earthly possessions were embraced in a small sum of money, a few blankets and cooking utensils, and a wagon and four yoke of half-starved and broken-down cattle. He had indorsed a note for a large sum in favor of an Eastern firm, to save from attachment the store of his brother, who was the leading merchant of a neighboring village. The result was that he lost his farm, which the brother vainly endeavored to save, and with the little remaining of the wreck procured a modest outfit and started for California.

Disposing of his cattle and wagon for less than



one-half their real value, he purchased a small clap-board house near the old American river Slough, and stocking it with a variety of plain provisions, placed his family in their first humble home in the far West. His purpose was to leave them there while he sought his fortune anew in the gold fields. But the cholera, which he had escaped on the Plains, made him its victim at the end of his journey, and he was laid to rest by his agonized wife and daughter in that terrible old burial ground near Sutter's Fort, where the remains of so many of the pioneers of 1849 and 1850 were hastily and without ceremony hidden from sight, the prey of a remorseless scourge.

They returned to their desolate home. Throwing her arms around her mother's neck, Jennie sobbed from her heart :

"We are poor and in a strange land, mother ! Oh ! what shall we do ?"

The good mother raised her sad eyes toward heaven, and her only reply was, "Let us pray !" And they knelt there in that little house by the Slough; and up through the surrounding air of profanity and irreverence was wafted a prayer from two stricken hearts, appealing for support and guidance to that Source from which the pure in heart have the promise of strength and consolation.

They rose to their feet, and there was a calm on the pale face of the mother as she said :

"There is labor for the hands in California, and

we both know how to work. You are brave and strong, and we shall not suffer."

Nor did they suffer. The most of the washing in Sacramento was done by Chinese at that time; but no sooner had Jennie lettered upon a large sheet of white paper and tacked upon the door the words "Washing and Ironing," than work began to come to them in abundance.

Without being positively beautiful, as the term is usually applied, Jennie would have attracted attention almost anywhere. She had a round and well-developed form, and her step was strong and elastic. Her eyes and hair were dark, and her cheeks and lips were rosy with health and exercise. Although a farm-house had been her home from childhood, her education had not been neglected, and she had been schooled in the graces and refinements of the best society.

More than all this, Jennie possessed a few robust accomplishments which the city-bred damsel seldom acquires. She sat a horse with the confidence and tenacity of an Apache, and with a rifle could pick a squirrel from the top of the tallest tree. She knew the burrow of the woodchuck and the haunt of the raccoon, and a familiarity with the use of firearms rendered her reckless of the dangers of the forest. Notwithstanding her knowledge of these masculine pastimes, in which she had been instructed and encouraged by her father, she was diffident in the presence of strangers, and at all times quiet and retiring.

It was a novelty in Sacramento at that time to see such round, white arms in a wash-tub, and many a bundle of soiled clothing was brought to the house, not more for the purpose of assisting the worthy widow than of exchanging a word or two with the rosy-cheeked and bright-eyed daughter.

Thus, month after month they toiled on and prospered. In time they added another modest room to the house, and surrounded themselves with a few of the comforts to which they had been accustomed. Then gentlemen sometimes called, and they found Jennie as queenly in the little parlor as she was heroic at her humble work.

Among those who visited the house of Mrs. Newland in the winter of 1851-2 was Orville Bement. Attracted by Jennie's pretty face, he had taken his washing there, and not unfrequently soiled a few handkerchiefs and collars as a pretext for an additional visit. The name he gave was Lewis Southard. He represented that he was an interior merchant spending a portion of the winter in Sacramento, and Jennie did not know to the contrary. He was a fine-looking young man, as already described to the reader, intelligent, entertaining and liberal with his means, and Jennie soon found herself waiting for his visits.

The mother observed the growing intimacy of Jennie and her new friend, of whom she knew nothing, and prudently set to work to learn something of his calling and antecedents. Bement was

not long in discovering the situation, and arranged with three or four of his friends to impart the desired information. One after another they found occasion to refer in glowing terms, either in the presence of Mrs. Newland or the daughter, to young Southard, as they were instructed to call him. They spoke of him as a prosperous merchant in an interior town, and the son of a wealthy New York banker.

The simple-minded mother was satisfied, and when Jennie blushing informed her a few days after that Southard had asked her to become his wife, and that she believed she loved him well enough to give him her hand, no farther objection was made.

Everything having been arranged, the marriage ceremony was quietly performed in the little parlor in the presence of four or five friends, and Bement took up his residence in the home of the bride. He prevailed upon the mother to remove from the door the sign of "Washing and Ironing," declaring that the wife of Lewis Southard was above such menial employment, and that he would soon remove both of them to a pleasant home in the mountains.

In anticipation of the promised change, Mrs. Newland gave herself up to a season of rest, and indulged in extravagances which soon left her almost without a dollar. Bement contributed little or nothing to the support of the family, his excuse being that expected remittances had failed to come to hand,

and after a two months' honeymoon he abruptly left for the mountains, promising the still confiding Jennie that he would either return in a few weeks or send for her and her mother.

Weeks and months passed without bringing any tidings of Bement, and the roses began to fade from the cheeks of the young wife. The mother half feared that her daughter had been made the victim of a scoundrel ; and although they replaced upon the door the old sign of "Washing and Ironing," both worked with less energy than in the past, for the future was golden to them no longer, and their bright bow of promise had faded from the heavens.

But poor Jennie's cup of misery was not yet full. The mother was stricken down with inflammation of the lungs, and in less than a week was laid beside her husband. Oh, the agony that lingered in the eyes of the dying mother as she thought of the defenseless child she was leaving behind her ! It was only equaled by the torture that rent the heart of Jennie as she threw herself upon the dying couch of the only one to whom she could look for counsel.

Bement doubtless heard of the death of Mrs. Newland, for a week after Jennie received a brief letter from him, begging her to take the stage as soon as possible and meet him at Forest City. Hope revived again in her heart. Disposing of the little furniture in the house, and giving possession of the premises to the purchaser, she proceeded at once to Forest City, and threw herself into the arms of Lewis

Southard, as he was known to her and generally known to others. He received her with something like indifference ; but she heeded it not, for she had found him and was happy.

Bement had a double motive in sending for Jennie. His first was to make her of service behind the gaming table, where attractive women commanded high salaries. His next and more important was to lead her into a career of vice, and either in her death or the forfeiture of the respect of the world, wipe out the traces of his treachery.

Jennie was not long in discovering that she had been deceived in the man whom she believed to be her husband. Instead of being a merchant, as he had represented, the gambling-houses were his haunts, while his companions, to whom he frequently introduced her, were rough, disrespectful and forbidding.

From a boarding-house in Forest City, he took her to another in Minnesota, a few miles distant, and there left her, sometimes for days together, without making his appearance. He finally removed her to a small cabin on the outskirts of the village, containing two or three rough bunks with straw mattresses and blankets, a few cooking utensils, and a small quantity of provisions.

"What does all this mean, Lew?" inquired Jennie, looking around the miserable hovel into which she had been taken. "Am I to stay here?"

"Either stay or leave!" was the brutal reply.

"The surroundings are not very pleasant, I admit, but you can easily earn the money to improve them."

"How can I earn the money, Lew?" said Jennie, softly, with the tears flooding her sad eyes.

"Why, behind a lansquenette or ten-dice table, where your face is worth a hundred dollars a week! But you won't do it," he continued. "You are altogether too particular for this rough country, and I am getting tired of your absurd prudery!"

"I can't do that, Lew!" she replied, putting her arms around his neck. "You know I can't! There is something terrible in the thought of mingling with crowds of rough men, and submitting to their coarse insults of eye and tongue."

"Well, you have other means," he said, disengaging her arms and averting his eyes from her face.

"Yes, Lew, I can wash and iron," she replied, and her face brightened at the thought of having made an important development of her resources. "Yes, I can do both, and if you will——"

"Bah!" interrupted Bement, impatiently. "The idea of a woman of your face and form talking of washing and ironing! Don't be a fool!" With this Bement turned and walked hastily out of the cabin, closing the door behind him.

"Great God!" she cried in agony, sinking to the floor and burying her face in her hands. "Great God! And this man is my husband!"

For a week she moved around the cabin almost as if in a dream, her cheek becoming paler daily, and her step more unsteady. She hoped it possible that she had misunderstood Bement, but feared to ask an explanation, lest the last spark of hope might be crushed out of her heart forever.

When he came, she mechanically prepared his meals, of which he seldom partook more than a mouthful, and she experienced a feeling of relief when he left. Sometimes he came to the cabin after dark, with two or three rough companions, and spent the evening there. On such occasions she retired to her bunk, with a blanket suspended in front of it, and at times caught sentences of low conversations which almost curdled her blood.

Frequently she thought of flying from the cabin during his absence, and returning to Sacramento, or anywhere to rid herself of his presence; but something restrained her and counseled patience.

After remaining out all one night, Bement entered the cabin late the next morning and found Jennie in tears. He had been drinking, and there was a slight wound upon his face.

"What's the matter with you?" he began, with a drunken sneer. "You have done nothing but cry for the past two or three weeks. Why don't you hunt up some agreeable companion when I'm away? I won't be jealous."

The meaning of these terrible words could not be mistaken. With a fire flashing in her dark eyes



which he had never seen before, she sprang to her feet, and pointing her finger at him, exclaimed :

"You contemptible dog ! And you *dare* to make such a proposal to your wife !"

"My wife ! my wife !" he repeated, in a tone of sarcasm which almost froze the blood in her veins. "I have no wife ! Our marriage ceremony was a fraud, and you do not even bear my name !"

"Liar as well as villain !" she frantically exclaimed. "Retract those terrible words, or by the God that made us I will kill either you or myself, and I care but little which !"

In her desperation she sprang toward him. Brute that he was, he struck her in the face with his clenched fist, and with a wild scream of despair she fell to the floor.

A knock was heard at the door, to which there was no response, and the next moment it was shoved violently open, and a large, broad-shouldered man stepped into the cabin.

"I beg pardon, sir," said the intruder, politely ; "but I thought I heard the scream of a woman as I was passing, and stepped in to see——"

"To interfere in something which does not concern you," interrupted Bement.

"The distresses of a defenseless woman concern every one who claims the right to be called a man !" was the calm reply.

"Such knight-errantry is exceedingly romantic, in these practical times," said Bement, with a sneer.

"But you should appear in armor to make the picture perfect."

Grant saw that he was dealing with an accomplished ruffian, as he replied :

"I have neither blade in poise nor lance at rest, but you will find, sir, that I am not defenseless. My presence is purely accidental ; but here is something which suggests, with your own discourteous attitude, that in this case, at least, interference is a duty ;" and he pointed to Jennie's bleeding face.

Observing the presence of a stranger, Jennie had with difficulty risen to her feet, and stood leaning upon the table for support.

"Did *he* do this?" inquired the stranger, taking a step forward and addressing the bewildered girl. "Do not be afraid to speak."

She raised her pale face, down which the blood was trickling from a wound on the forehead, and looking first at the stranger and then at Bement, slowly shook her head in the negative.

"Are you satisfied?" inquired Bement, with assumed politeness. "But, whether satisfied or not, you will favor me by leaving the house."

"I am satisfied of one thing," returned the stranger ; "and that is that you have been coward enough to strike this woman, and she woman enough to acquit you of the outrage !" And turning, he stepped toward the door, which was slightly ajar.

As he opened it, and the light fell upon his face, Bement snatched a knife from a scabbard

secreted in an inside breast pocket, and hissing, "Take this, Grant Bouton!" sprang forward with the ferocity of a tiger, and made a savage thrust at Grant's back, with an evident intent to reach the heart.

The intruder was indeed Grant Bouton. He had come up from the bar that morning early, and was returning with a bundle of sharpened picks, when a woman's scream brought him to the cabin.

Grant observed the treacherous assault in time to escape the deadly stroke. The knife passed through a portion of the clothing without penetrating the flesh, and parrying a second thrust, he seized Bement by the arm and throat and hurled him to the floor. Then wrenching the weapon from his grasp and flinging it through the open door, he looked down into the face of the baffled assassin and hoarsely whispered:

"You are right! I *am* Grant Bouton! and I know *you* now! Assassin as well as coward—your name is Orville Bement!"

At the sight of the desperate encounter between the two men, with a wild cry of horror Jennie fell fainting to the floor.

"If there is any such thing as manhood left in you, look to her!" he exclaimed contemptuously to Bement; and striding from the cabin without another word, he shouldered the bundle he had left at the door, and started down the trail toward Braxton's Bar.

"Damn him! damn him!" hissed Bement through his teeth, now completely sobered by the excitement of the conflict. He brushed the dust from his coat, and stepping from the cabin to recover his knife, caught sight of Grant's burly form just as a turn in the trail took him behind an intervening cabin.

"Bill's description of him exactly!" he muttered. "Should he turn out to be Joe Braxton's partner, we will have a double settlement to make before long! This is better than I could have expected. Bill must have mistaken the name. It is not Houghton, but Bouton. Would it not be glorious to give him his quietus, and at the same time—well, we shall see! But one thing is sure: he knows something of me now, and will not stop until he learns more; but he shall not live to impart the information to those I would not have know it for my right hand! I have struck his trail at last, and will follow it to the end!"

Closing the cabin door, and leaving Jennie where she had fallen, Bement walked excitedly up the flat. After a brief search he found his companion, Bill Skates, playing cards in the back room of a low drinking saloon, and in a few minutes, the two walked leisurely out into the street. They separated without seeming to recognize each other, but shortly after met behind an old cattle corral back of the village, where they were reasonably secure from observation.

"You seem to be excited, Lew," began Bill. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing!" was the reply. "A little trouble with that woman of mine—that's all!"

"From the looks of your face, I should say she didn't keep her nails pared," said Bill, glancing at something like a scratch on the forehead of his companion.

"That is not her work," replied Bement. "She is not one of the fighting kind. I caught it during a little trouble over a game of poker last night. But never mind the scratch. When did you hear from Brakey?" he continued, evidently anxious to change the subject.

"He got in last night," said Bill, with a little chuckle. "He was as ragged and dirty as a Digger. He had a pretty rough time of it, I guess; but he volunteered to do the business, and has no right to complain."

"Well, what has he discovered?" inquired Bement, eagerly.

"A great deal," replied Bill; "enough, I think, to make the way clear. One of the partners, it seems, is a friend or relative of old Scully, who keeps the meat-market below the express office. Almost every Sunday evenin' he comes up and spends the night with the butcher and his wife, and goes back early in the mornin' after doin' a little tradin'. I believe they're cousins, or something of the sort."

"That one is Braxton," suggested Bement.

"Yes—Joe Braxton—he's the one," said Bill ;  
"and they've taken out a mule-load of money, with  
plenty still in sight !"

"And the name of the other—the large man you  
have described to me—is not Houghton, as we have  
supposed, but Bouton," continued Bement. "At  
least, so I have reason to believe."

"Did you ever see him ?" inquired Bill.

"No—yes—that is, I think I saw him on the  
street this morning, but am not sure," was the un-  
satisfactory answer.

"You are right, Lew ; his name *is* Bouton," re-  
sumed Bill, reaching into his pocket and producing  
a scrap of paper, "for here it is on the wrapper of a  
newspaper, which he tore off and Brakey picked up  
in the street."

"Yes, Grant Bouton !" hissed Bement, taking  
the paper from Bill, and the next moment nervously  
crushing it in his hand.

"Well, what about the dust ?" he inquired, im-  
patiently.

"I guess that has been spotted," replied Bill.  
"After shadowin' the place day and night for almost  
a week, Brakey is satisfied that the chink is *cached*  
somewhere in the cabin. He watched 'em through  
two clean-ups, and is dead sure that they hid nothin'  
on the outside. They may have packed the dust  
away from the bar, but the chances are a hundred to  
one that it's in the cabin somewhere, and I believe I

could put my hand on it in five minutes, for I know about where such stuff is generally tucked away when no great danger is feared. I've gone through a cabin or two in my time, and can't be counted a green hand at the business."

"I am not putting you up as a novice in the arts of rascality, by any means," said Bement, in a tone which seemed to greatly flatter the experienced cracksman. "What you know about such matters would make a volume as large as a family Bible."

"And be a heap better readin'!" volunteered Bill.

"For some readers, perhaps," suggested Bement; "but it would hardly be the thing for Sunday-school instruction or a Methodist class-meeting.

"That's all you know about it!" returned Bill. "Just such books used to be read when I went to Sunday-school—stories about bad little boys who stole things and had a good time, and then repented and had another. After readin' one of them stories, I nipped the teacher's handkerchief the first Sunday I went there, and got a nice stick of candy for givin' it up. 'Tain't the fellers that never do anything wrong that get the mealiest pertaters, but the chaps that make things howl for a while and then reform; and that's just what I intend to do one of these days."

"Don't think of it until we take this trick! It would disconcert matters if you did!" bantered

Bement. "But I guess everything is all right. If the dust is in the cabin, we'll find it."

"Sure!" said Bill, emphatically.

"This is Thursday," continued Bement. "If Braxton pays his usual visit to Scully next Sunday, we will finish the job that night. Hunt up Brakey, and tell him to meet us at the cabin at eleven to-night, and we will arrange the details."

"I know where to put my hand on him," was the confident reply, "and we'll be there without fail."

After glancing cautiously around, the men abruptly separated, walking rapidly off in opposite directions.



## CHAPTER XII.

### *The Braxton's Bar Robbery—Jennie Arrives too Late— A Close Shot.*



LITTLE past eleven o'clock of the night following the interview behind the corral, Brakey and Skates, with a prudent interval between their arrival, dropped cautiously into Bement's cabin. No light was visible within, and as the cabin was some distance from the business part of the town, they entered without observation.

Brakey had been provided with a respectable suit of clothes, which rendered somewhat less distasteful his naturally repulsive presence. But he was a useful scoundrel, and Bement could not get along very well without him. He was an escaped convict from the California State prison, where he was undergoing a sentence of five years for grand larceny, and was unusually well-skilled in the arts of desperate villainy.

Jennie had recovered from the swoon in which Bement had brutally left her in the morning, and presented a pitiful appearance as she opened the

door on his return that night. Her face was pale, and there was a bandage around her forehead with blood upon it ; but her eyes were tearless, and had Bement taken the trouble to look into them, he would have been startled at their changed expression.

"Well, how do you feel, Jennie?" inquired Bement, indifferently.

"Better than you would have me feel, no doubt, and better than an outcast should feel," she coldly replied.

"Now don't be foolish, my dear," he continued, with assumed penitence ; "I had been drinking this morning, and was in bad humor. I hope I did not strike you. If I did it was an accident." And he put his arm around her waist and drew her to him.

She firmly disengaged herself from his embrace, and stepping back and looking him coldly in the face, said :

"We have had too much of this hypocrisy already, Lew Southard ! it was not the blow on the face, but the stab at the heart that has made us strangers. As a wife I have borne your cruelty, and will not submit to your embrace as a mistress !"

"Very dramatic, but a little out of place," was the freezing comment of Bement.

"Not more out of place than I am ! Oh, God !" she continued, "what have I done that this blight should have fallen upon me !"

"You have probably misconstrued something that I have said, and are making yourself unneces-

sarily miserable over it," said Bement, either touched for a moment with a feeling of remorse or alarmed at Jennie's emotion. "Now, let us have no more of this. A couple of friends will be here shortly, and you had better crawl into your bunk and go to sleep."

"I shall certainly do so," replied Jennie. "I think I know who are to be your callers, and have no desire to become one of the party."

Jennie retired before Bement's companions made their appearance, carefully adjusting the blanket in front of the bunk to screen herself as far as possible from observation.

Seated around a small table, the dim light was extinguished, and for some time a low conversation, of which Jennie could catch an occasional sentence, was continued. A disagreement finally arose, and Bement's voice indicated that he was very much in earnest about something. The men became less discreet, and Jennie cautiously raised a corner of the woolen screen and listened.

"I tell you I don't like it!" Jennie recognized the voice of Brakey.

"But there is no help for it!" replied Bement, with energy. "He is as strong as an ox and as agile as a panther. He must be either killed or crippled. I know the brute. I have felt his muscle!"

Jennie now felt assured that they were speaking of the man who had come to her defense that morn-

ing, and whom Bement had attempted to assassinate.

"Yes, he must be killed!" continued Bement, with emphasis, "and I have more reasons than one for saying so. I will attend to that part of the business. My plan is to knock at the door, and when he opens it, send a slug through his brain. The cabin can then be leisurely searched, and without interference."

"I reckon that's the only safe plan, Sam," interposed Skates, who was by no means the most courageous of the party. "He's as big as a mountain, and I'd as soon try to rope and gag a hippopottermust!"

"Well, perhaps you're right, Lew," replied Brakey. "I don't like the idea of lettin' out a light when it can be helped, but we'll consider that part of the business settled."

"Now about the route, Brakey," said Bement, delighted that the murder of Grant had been agreed upon.

"Well," was the answer, "I have scouted the neighborhood a good deal, and my plan would be to meet at the old shake factory, about three miles above town, at twelve o'clock next Sunday night. The trail turns off to the right there that leads down the cañon to Braxton's bar, which isn't more'n a mile and a half from the main road. The trail down the cañon is pretty rough, for it hasn't been traveled a great deal and was never anything

better than an Injin make-shift ; but I've looked at the almanac, and find that the moon will get up about the time we start for the river. That will give us light enough to keep the trail."

"Well, what then?" inquired Bement

"What then?" repeated Brakey. "Why, after doin' the business, we'd better drop down the river to German Bar, and from there slip quietly back to Minnesota, where we'll *cache* the swag and then go to bed as if nothin' had happened."

"But," suggested Bement, "why would it not be just as well to go up the river from German Bar, and return by the cañon trail? The distances are about the same."

"Because," replied the more sagacious Brakey, "it's easier gittin' back into town without bein' seen from the river than from the divide. I've looked the thing all over."

"You're an angel, Sam!" said Skates, with enthusiasm. "You ought to be a bank president or a preacher. You're wastin' your talents on little jobs like this!"

"Before we git through with it," replied Brakey, "this may turn out to be a bigger job than you imagine. There's a pile of money in it, but a heap of danger."

"Never mind the danger, boys!" said Bement, encouragingly. "Nothing ventured, nothing made, you know. I'll throw the lead while you hunt the spelter! But are you sure Braxton will be up on

Sunday? If not, the job will have to be put off until he does come, for we can't handle the pair of them."

"I'll 'tend to that!" replied Skates. "We'll meet here at 'leven o'clock next Sunday night, and if he's in town we'll fix for the racket without any more palaver. Until then we'd better not be seen together."

The arrangements having been completed, Brakey and Skates quietly took their departure. Bement remained in his seat in the darkness for a few minutes, reflecting upon the bloody work that had been laid out. He then cautiously groped his way to the bunk occupied by Jennie, and, raising the blanket, softly laid his hand upon her shoulder. She shuddered at the touch, but did not speak or move.

"She is asleep," thought Bement; and feeling around the table until he found his hat, he silently left the cabin, closing the door behind him.

But Jennie had not been asleep. She had heard enough, however, to curdle the blood in her veins, and when she caught a few moments of slumber at intervals during the night, her dreams were full of horrors.

Bement must have suspected that Jennie was not asleep through all the interview of the evening, for until the final meeting of the party on Sunday night, he remained almost constantly in or around the cabin. He did not know that she had overheard

any part of their conversation ; but in case she had, he deemed it prudent to guard against possible betrayal, and therefore afforded her no opportunity of communicating with any one, either by letter or otherwise.

Once or twice he had manifested something like remorse at the terrible situation in which he had placed the poor girl ; but she accepted his acts of kindness coldly, and he was not displeased at her indifference. Unable to bend her to his vile purposes, he had concluded to abandon her, but was still merciful enough to hope that his cruelties had prepared her for a comparatively painless separation.

When he returned to the cabin, after a short absence, between ten and eleven o'clock on Sunday night, he found Jennie in bed, with a candle still burning on the table. He spoke to her, and found that she was not asleep.

He walked the room nervously for a few minutes, and then reaching under a bunk usually occupied by himself when he slept in the cabin, drew forth and opened a large sachel. He took from it a stout duck coat, a pair of coarse boots, an old slouch hat with a broad brim, and a leathern belt from which were suspended a large navy revolver and a bowie-knife. He carefully examined the weapons to see that they were in order, and satisfying himself that they were ready for use, securely buckled the belt around him. Hastily exchanging

his boots, coat and hat, he crowded into the sachel the articles of which he had divested himself. Then taking from one of his coat pockets a small package of powdered ochre, he slightly dampened and applied it to his hands and face, completely changing his appearance. This done, he took from a shelf a small steel bar about two feet in length, one of the ends being pointed and the other flattened like a wedge. He finally buttoned the coat closely around his breast and throat, extinguished the light, and seated himself near the door.

All this had been observed by Jennie through an opening in the screen of her bunk. Now believing that Bement was capable of anything, her heart beat violently as he extinguished the light, deeming not impossible that he had concluded to take her life to prevent exposure before undertaking his bloody work on the river.

It was therefore with a feeling of relief that she heard a low tap on the window. The signal was also heard by Bement, for he rose and cautiously opened the door, and Brakey, equipped for the occasion, whispered "All right!" and disappeared in the darkness. Bement waited a few minutes, and then quietly left the cabin for the midnight rendezvous at the old shake factory.

Jennie sprang from her hard couch, and for a moment listened at the door. She then noiselessly opened it and caught sight of the vanishing form of Bement in the distance. It was full five minutes



before she deemed it prudent to light the candle, and when she did, and caught sight of her face in the fragment of a mirror on the table, its pallor startled her; but her heart was fearless, and there was no tremor in her hand.

"Now for it, Lew Southard!" said Jennie, bringing to the table and opening the sachel in which Bement had hastily stuffed his change of coat, hat and boots. "He is a brave man, and you shall neither rob nor murder him if a desperate and hopeless woman can prevent it! He would have protected me because I was a woman, and I will save him, should it cost me my life, because he is a man who worthily wears the name! I can reach him in time, and if warned, he is more than a match for all of them; and after thwarting the merciless devils, it were better for me to be anywhere than here!"

She knew what the sachel contained, for she had seen the articles which Bement had placed in it a few minutes before. The pantaloons were a world too long, but she turned them up at the bottoms, and the fit was reasonably satisfactory. The sleeves of the coat were abbreviated in the same manner, and after rolling her long hair into the crown, she found but little difficulty in keeping the hat upon her head. There was no remedy for the unnecessary capacity of the boots, beyond a handkerchief wrapped around each foot; but they were better than her own light gaiters for the rough trail over which she was about to pass.

Thus attired, she took from her own sachel the little jewelry she possessed, and from the bottom drew forth a Texas five-shooter and belt which had belonged to her father. She had often used the weapon, and could handle it skillfully. She kissed the trusty friend as she removed it from the scabbard; but she was a woman, nevertheless, and as the recollection of happy events associated with it crowded upon her, she dropped upon a bench beside the table and sobbed like a child. But it was for a moment only. The next she rose to her feet, and satisfying herself that the weapon was charged and in order, strapped the belt around her slender waist and hastily left the cabin.

The descent to the river was exceedingly difficult, for the night was dark, and the trail skirted abrupt declivities and wound through deep ravines. She knew nothing of Braxton's bar beyond what she had overheard; but it was on the river somewhere above the bar below Minnesota, and she determined to find it.

Reaching German Bar, the moon began to throw its pale light against the hillsides, but it was half an hour or more before the trail along the river to Braxton's bar could be readily followed. She was at times alarmed at her slow progress, but toiled resolutely on regardless of fatigue, and with the constant prayer in her heart that she might not arrive too late,

Meantime, Bement and his companions had met

at the old shake factory, and after hurriedly arranging some details, had started down the cañon trail. The path was rough and in many places obscure; but Brakey, who had made himself familiar with it, took the advance, and they reached the bar without unusual difficulty.

They halted at the mouth of the cañon, about a hundred yards above the cabin, for a final consultation. There was no light in the house, which stood out distinctly in the moonlight, and the only sounds heard were of the waters leaping over the riffle below the bar, and the indolent August winds whispering through the pines.

After a muffled conversation for some minutes, weapons were drawn, hats were tightened upon the head and pulled down in front, the clicking of pistols followed, and the party moved cautiously down in front of the cabin. Bringing his cocked revolver to the level of his breast, Bement knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" came from within.

Bement beckoned to Skates, who promptly answered: "A miner, like yourself. I sprained my ankle among the rocks this afternoon, and should like to have a bunk for the night, if you have one to spare."

The appeal was sufficient for Grant. He sprang from his bunk, drew on his pantaloons, lighted and placed a candle upon the table, and then, without a suspicion of treachery, unbarred and opened the

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door. Before he had time to distinguish anything, a light flashed in his face, the report of a pistol rang in his ears, and he fell backward upon the floor like an ox.

The assassins entered the cabin. There was a dark stain on Grant's forehead, and he lay motionless where he had fallen.

"You made a good job of it, Lew ; he's as dead as a door-nail !" said Brakey, taking the candle from the table and looking down at the blood-stained face. "The ball has gone through the brain. Let's lift the body into the bunk out of the way."

The apparently lifeless body was raised and carelessly thrown into the bunk from which Grant had risen, and placing their cocked pistols upon the table, the search for treasure began. With sharpened sticks prepared for the purpose, they went rapidly over the hard ground floor, everywhere penetrating it in quest of loose or freshly removed earth.

"Here it is !" exclaimed Skates ; "I knew I could find it ! Hunt up a shovel or something !"

He had removed a couple of puncheons from a corner, on which had been placed, as a security against moisture, three or four sacks of provisions, and under them had discovered unmistakable indications of a deposit.

An old shovel used about the fire was produced, and in a few minutes the treasure was unearthed. The robbers had reason to be astonished at the value

of the deposit, for one by one they drew forth five large ale bottles and four pint oyster cans filled with gold dust, such nuggets being placed in the cans as were too large for the necks of the bottles.

"By the Lord, boys, we've struck it fat this time!" said Skates. "It's like gittin' into a bank vault!"

"And now that we've cleaned it, let's think about gittin' out!" replied the cautious Brakey. "We can't make tracks too soon, for we don't know who may have heard the crack of the pistol!"


So dividing the dust as to make the carriage convenient, they were about to start down the river, when Bement suggested that it would be as well to fire the cabin.

"No, no!" exclaimed Brakey, promptly. "Don't think of such a thing! That would attract too much attention."

"Then I'll make the job sure in some other way!" hissed Bement; and, snatching his revolver from the table, he stepped to the bunk upon which Grant was lying, and deliberately aimed at the breast, with the muzzle of the pistol within two feet of it, and fired.

"Great God, man, what are you doing?" growled Brakey, springing forward and seizing Bement's arm. "Do you want to rouse the whole country? The man's as dead as lead can make him!"

"I'm satisfied now," said Bement, replacing the pistol in his belt. "The last shot has finished him no matter what may have been the effect of the



first. But I believe I'll cut his throat," he continued, reaching into his pocket for a knife.

"You won't do anything of the sort!" now interposed Skates, half horrified at Bement's barbarity. "Why, you're worse than a Sioux Injin to want to hack up the dead!"

"All right, since you have suddenly become so sensitive," said Bement, savagely. "But I wanted that man's life more than I did his gold!"

"If he had as many as a cat you've got 'em all!" urged Brakey. "Now come along, unless you're determined to give us away!"

Bement was finally diverted from his barbarous purpose, when the light was extinguished, and the robbers with their booty started down the river, Brakey leading and Bement following Skates.

Just as Jennie reached the lower end of the little bar she heard the report of a pistol—the last shot fired by Bement—and was horrified at the thought that she had arrived too late. Peering through the moonlight in the direction from which the unwelcome sound seemed to reach her, she distinguished the cabin of which she was in search.

Resolutely drawing the revolver from her belt and cocking it, the brave girl was about to approach the cabin and learn the worst, when she saw three dark objects emerge from it and drop down into the trail in which she was standing. She felt satisfied that they had completed their devilish work, but

knew that it would be death to her to attempt to oppose their escape.

Hastily secreting herself among the rocks above the trail, with throbbing heart she waited for them to pass. They were some distance apart. First came Brakey, then Skates, and finally Bement. Notwithstanding their disguise she knew them all, for she was not more than twenty-five feet from the trail.

As Bement approached she raised her pistol, but the thought of taking a human life, whatever the provocation, for the moment unnerved her. "And why not?" she thought, appealing to her own heart. "He has betrayed me, and robbed and probably murdered a brave and good man. He is unfit to live, and the first to meet him with the means should be his executioner!"

A few steps brought him to a point in the trail nearest her place of concealment. Quick as thought she raised the pistol and fired. He staggered and fell. Presuming that she had either killed or fatally wounded him, she prepared to meet his companions should they return to his rescue; but before they sufficiently recovered from their astonishment to decide what to do, he rose to his feet and moved rapidly down the river. She fired two more shots in rapid succession, with the view of accelerating the speed of the assassins, and then stepped cautiously down into the trail. For a moment she listened to their retreating footsteps, growing fainter and

fainter in the distance, and then with a heart racked with apprehension proceeded to the cabin.

She opened the door and peered into the darkness. All was silent as the grave. She ignited a match and stepped within, and observing a candle on a table near the entrance, lighted it. Casting her eyes nervously around, for it was a situation well calculated to appall a woman, she was about to proceed to an examination of the bunks in the back part of the room, when a low moan from one of them almost stopped the beating of her heart.

It was not fear that made her hand tremble now, but an indefinable awe, as she appreciated for the first time that she was alone with the dead or dying in a gloomy mountain gorge, far from the habitations of men and beyond the reach of counsel or assistance.

Taking the candle from the table, she stepped almost in a daze beside the first bunk, and looking down, beheld the blood-stained face of Grant Bouton. His eyes were closed, but she placed her hand upon his heart and found that he was still living.

"Thank God, he is not dead!" she fervently exclaimed.

At the sound of her voice, Grant opened his eyes, and the next moment closed them as he whispered "Water!"

Jennie now knew the worst, except as to the extent and character of Grant's wounds, and at once became a ministering angel. She drew the table



beside the bunk, and placing the candle upon it, ran to the river, and in a few minutes returned with a full bucket of the precious fluid.

She found a dipper, and gently raising the head of the sufferer, placed it to his lips, and he drained it to the last drop. Then with a towel she washed the blood from his face and neck, when she discovered to her joy that the bullet had struck the forehead at the base of the hair, and glancing upward, had plowed a furrow through the scalp without penetrating the brain. Yet, for all that, she understood that it might be a dangerous wound, for the skull might be fractured, and inflammation of the brain would necessarily follow.

He was faint from the loss of blood, but the water refreshed him, and he was soon able to use his limbs a little, and faintly reply to Jennie's questions. She told him that the wound on his head was not dangerous—for she now became convinced that his brain was not affected—but he placed his hand to his side and whispered: "I have something worse here."

Jennie looked down and found that his pantaloons and the blankets under him were saturated with blood. She knew that something ought to be done at once, for he was still bleeding; and with that broad and practical humanity, which in such emergencies overshadows the restraints of propriety and the instincts of womanly diffidence, she unhesi-

tatingly removed his clothing and examined the wound to which he had directed attention.

She discovered a bullet-hole in the right side, immediately opposite the heart, but was unable to determine the direction the ball had taken. However, as he had raised no blood, she had good reason to hope that the bullet had not penetrated the cavity of the chest, but had been diverted from its intended course by the ribs, and lodged in some less vital part of the body.

Procuring and tearing into strips an old cotton shirt, she washed and bandaged the wound as best she could, believing that the obstruction of the hemorrhage would lead to no disastrous effects internally. Then, with Grant's assistance, she exchanged the blankets and removed his blood-soaked clothing.

Covering him with a blanket—for the night air was growing chilly—she awaited with anxiety the effects of the bandage on the side. She gave him more water, and then sat down and watched him as he passed off into a quiet dose. Thus she remained for fifteen or twenty minutes, when he reopened his eyes, which had grown brighter, and she saw there was neither nausea nor other indication of internal bleeding.

Now feeling that his wounds were not of a necessarily fatal character, she washed the blood from his hair, placed a wet cloth upon his head, readjusted his hard pillow, bathed his face and hands, and then asked him if he was resting comfortably.

"Yes," he replied, turning his eyes toward Jennie with a look of gratitude. And then, after a pause, he added : "You are very kind, young man, and it must have been a good angel that sent you here at such a moment."

Addressed as a "young man," Jennie was reminded of her strange costume for the first time since entering the cabin. She removed the hat, which had partly hidden her face, allowing her hair to drop down over her shoulders, and with a blush upon her cheeks and a sad smile playing with her lips, said :

"I am a woman, but do not think you recognize me. You probably never saw me but once, and then my face was stained with blood."

Grant gazed at the fair face for a moment, and extending his hand, replied :

"Yes, yes ; I know you now ; but how came you here at such a time ?"

"To try to save you from murder and robbery," answered Jennie ; "but I could not get here in time."

"Robbery ? robbery ?" repeated Grant, attempting to collect his thoughts. "No doubt ! I do not know what occurred until you came." Then pointing toward the corner where the treasure had been buried, his face became paler as he whispered : "see if the puncheons have been moved !"

She complied, and returning, informed him that the puncheons had been pushed aside and the earth removed to a considerable depth in the corner.

"Then they have taken everything! everything! everything!" whispered Grant in a tone of agony. He closed his eyes, and nervously placed his hand to his throat as if choking. In alarm Jennie gave him a swallow of water, and began to bathe his face. He looked up with a bewildered stare.

"Have you been robbed of a very large amount?" inquired Jennie.

"A large amount?" replied Grant. "The earnings of a lifetime anywhere except here!"

"Well, you must think no more about it now," said Jennie, imploringly. "You are dangerously wounded and very weak. And besides, the money may be recovered."

Grant shook his head.

"One of the party, Lew Southard—for there were three of them," continued Jennie, "is the man whom I believed to be my husband until the day he attempted to assassinate you in Minnesota. When you entered the cabin he had just informed me that I was not his wife and did not even bear his name. When I reproached him for his treachery, he struck me. You know the rest!"

Tears filled her eyes at the recital, and covering her face with her hands, she bent over the side of the bunk and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Lew Southard?" said Grant, in amazement. "Do you mean the man with whom I had the difficulty in your presence three or four days ago?"

"Yes," she replied; and unwilling that he should

do her the injustice of an unworthy thought for a moment, she looked him calmly in the face and continued :

"He has betrayed me as his wife, but has not debased me as his mistress !"

"Poor girl !" returned Grant. "You have indeed been betrayed ! The name of the man you call Lew Southard is Orville Bement ! I have known him from childhood."

"Well, whatever his name may be, or whatever may be our relation," exclaimed Jennie, rising to her feet, "he shall not escape ! I will return to Minnesota at once and give the alarm !"

"It would avail nothing," replied Grant. "Should the robbers return to Minnesota, they would not remain long after discovering your absence from the cabin. Remain where you are. You have exposed yourself to danger enough already. Braxton will be here in the morning, and we can then decide what is best to be done. Besides, now that I know Lew Southard, I am better reconciled to the robbery !" and a strange smile played over his pale face.

"Perhaps you are right," returned Jennie. "They have doubtless changed their original plan of escape, for I shot at, and am almost sure that I wounded, the scoundrel you call Bement as they were leaving the bar."

"Brave girl !" murmured Grant. "I believe this to be the work of Orville Bement, and I know

where, sooner or later, he may be found. The end is not yet. Leave him and your own great grievance to me!"

For a moment he raised his clenched hand, while his eyes glistened with excitement, and the next his head drooped languidly upon the pillow, and his arm fell helplessly at his side.

Jennie bathed his face, dampened the bandages on his wounds, removed the table so that the light of the candle would not reach his face, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him drop into a peaceful slumber.

For an hour or more she watched the sleeper, at intervals renewing the dampened cloth upon his head, for she was fearful of inflammation. At length her own eyes grew heavy. She stepped to the little window, and saw the first streaks of daylight in the East; then barring the door, she threw herself into one of the vacant bunks and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XIII.

*Joe Braxton's Return.—His Meeting with Jennie.—  
His Provision for her Comfort.*



HE sun was looking over the hills, and gilding the tops of the pines around the cabin on Braxton's Bar, when Jennie was aroused by a loud knock at the door. On opening her eyes, for a moment she did not know where she was ; but as the events of the preceding night finally flashed upon her, she sprang from the bunk, unbarred and opened the door, and Joe Braxton, with a number of parcels in his arms, entered the cabin.

As he caught sight of the strange-looking being before him, he was transfixed into a statue as mute and motionless as the wife of Lot after she had looked behind her. Habited in the loose coat, boots and pantaloons in which she had ascended the river, with her sweet, pale face beaming upon him like a star through the cloud-rifts of the dark hair sweeping her shoulders, Joe's first thought was that she was a mermaid or water sprite, who had emerged from one of the whirlpools in the cañon







to beguile him to his destruction or point out the spot of some uncommon treasure.

He was about to speak—to say “good morning,” or pass some other courteous remark—when Jennie placed her fingers upon her lips to admonish silence, and pointed toward the bunk upon which Grant was lying, apparently still asleep.

Coming in from the light, Joe was unable at the moment to clearly distinguish objects around him, and more than ever bewildered at Jennie’s mysterious admonition, began to deposit slowly and mechanically upon the table the parcels with which he was laden. This done, Jennie laid her hand lightly upon his arm, and approaching the door, beckoned him to follow.

“She wants to lure me to the river,” thought Joe; “but she’s mighty pretty above the shoulders, and I’ll take the chances.”

Instead of proceeding to the river, however, much to Joe’s satisfaction Jennie passed around the cabin, and awaited his coming under a large pine a few yards beyond. As he approached, Joe discovered that she was simply a woman clad in ill-fitting male attire.

But the discovery did not relieve him completely from his embarrassment. A residence almost from boyhood in the wilds of the West had rendered him exceedingly timid in the female presence; but there was enough of the outward seeming of the man in Jennie’s appearance to enable him in acceptable

phrase to request an explanation of what had occurred during his absence, informing her, at the same time, that he was Bouton's partner.

"I supposed as much," said Jennie, modestly, "and presume you are Mr. Braxton."

"You are correct, ma'am," replied Joe, essaying a little bow ; "I'm Joe Braxton."

That Grant might be relieved of the danger of answering too many questions, Jennie then minutely related to Joe everything that had happened. She told him of her marriage with Lew Southard, which she feared had been a fraudulent ceremony ; of Grant's struggle with her betrayer in the cabin at Minnesota ; of her discovery of the plans of the robbers, and her attempt to reach the bar in time to defeat them ; of her shot at Southard in the trail below the bar, and the escape of the assassins down the river ; and, finally, of the condition in which she had found Grant, and the certainty that the buried treasure in the corner of their cabin had been unearthed and stolen.

Joe staggered as Jennie completed her story. "Great God ! this is terrible !" he exclaimed. "They've raked down a big pile of dust. But never mind that. How bad is Grant wounded ?"

"Not fatally, I think," replied Jennie, "although there is a wound in the side which I have not been able to very carefully examine."

"Thank God, then, there is hope !" returned Joe, devoutly. "Only let him live, and to the devil

with the dust ! There's more of it in the claim, but men of Grant Bouton's kind are mighty scarce. We'll do what we can for him, and then I'll break for a doctor."

They returned to the cabin and found Grant awake. Before he had time to speak Joe took his hand and said, while the great tears trickled down his bearded face :

"Not a word, Grant. I know it all. She has told me everything ! But how do you feel ?"

"Pretty weak, Joe, for I have bled like a bullock, and in considerable pain," replied Grant, cheerfully ; "but I shall live through it."

"Live through it? why, of course you will !" exclaimed Joe. "In less than a month you'll be snortin' round like a stampeded mustang ! But let me take a look at your scratches. I know a bullet-hole from a tarantula bite, and can stitch up a bowie slit without a thimble."

This was far from being an empty boast with Joe. The sight of blood did not affect his nerves. He had become familiar with wounds, having received many himself, and few men knew better what to do in an emergency.

He first removed the bandage and examined the wound on Grant's head. Running his finger along the furrow in the scalp, which had laid bare the skull for five or six inches without fracturing it, he announced, with evident relief :

"All right so far, my boy ! If the doctor was

here, he'd chaw over and spit out a lot of big words in hog Latin, which in the American language would mean about this : that you've had a mighty close call, and if the ball had struck an inch lower, there'd have been a funeral on the bar, and you'd have furnished the corpse. But no bones have been cracked, and you'll soon be able to butt a bull out of a ten-acre field."

Joe carefully washed the wound, and binding over it a wet cloth, proceeded to examine the injury in the side. Removing the pad which Jennie had bound upon the wound to stanch the flow of blood, an angry-looking bullet-hole was discovered.

"There's where it went in," said Joe ; "but which way did it travel after it got in ? that's the question. It was meant for mischief, sure," he continued, rolling Grant gently over and running his fingers along the back and sides. "Had it gone straight through, you'd have had a report from it before this time. I know how a man acts with a lump of lead in his stomach."

Joe was puzzled. "How did you find him ?" he inquired of Jennie.

"Lying very much as he is now," was the reply.

"Then he must have been shot in the bunk," returned Joe. "Now let me cipher this thing down a little. He was first plugged in the head. That's sure ; for if he hadn't been stunned, somebody else would 'a been hurt. There'd 'a been a lot of arms and legs round here that he'd 'a pulled off, just to

show the pirates that he was boss of the ranch. After the shot in the head, he was thrown into the bunk for dead, and then shot in the side to make a sure job of it just as the thieves left the cabin. That's my idea of the business."

"I think you are correct," said Jennie, "for I heard a shot just as I reached the bar, and in a few minutes saw them coming down the trail."

"Exactly!" said Joe, stepping across the cabin and taking a revolver from a shelf. He then placed himself in a position about three feet from the bunk, and immediately opposite Grant's breast. "Now, this is where he stood, and this is about the way he held his gun," continued Joe, aiming the weapon at the bullet-hole in Grant's side. He held it there for a moment, then throwing it on the foot of the bed, began to re-examine the wound.

Carefully washing the blood-stains from around it, he discovered a faint bluish line passing down the side from the point where the bullet had entered, but beyond that he could not trace its course.

When questioned, Grant admitted that he felt something like a sharp neuralgic pain in the hip opposite the wounded side, and when Joe pressed his fingers on the spot indicated, the pain was somewhat intensified.

"That'll do," said Joe, making the sufferer as comfortable as possible. "There's nothing very bad about the hurt. The ball has gone clear round the body under the skin, and lodged somewhere out

of danger. Should it ever bother you, Grant, it can be hunted up and cut out."

It was gratifying to all to learn that the wounds were by no means dangerous; yet it was deemed prudent to summon a physician, and Joe decided to start for one at once.

"After breakfast will do," suggested Grant. "This poor girl has been up all night, and we have eaten nothing this morning."

"Now, see what a brute I am!" exclaimed Joe. "Of course we'll have breakfast first—the finest kind of a breakfast! I brought down the best chunk of beef in Scully's shop, and we'll have fried onions and potatoes with it, and flapjacks and coffee. Nothing wrong with that sort of a lay-out, is there? Now, Miss—Miss—I forgot to ask your name," he continued, turning to Jennie.

"I scarcely know what my name is now," she replied, with a smile so sad that Joe felt like pulling his hair for asking the question; "but before I met Lew Southard it was Jennie Newland."

"Well, Miss Newland——"

"Not that, I beg of you," interrupted Jennie; "call me plain Jennie."

"All right, if you'll call me plain Joe."

"And me plain Grant," came faintly but cheerfully from the bunk.

"A voice from the tomb!" Joe ejaculated, solemnly. "Well, Jennie, as I was about to say, you just sit by the bunk and talk to Grant, and I'll

snatch the breakfast all out o' shape in about ten minutes."

But Jennie insisted upon taking a prominent part in the performance, and while Joe was lighting the fire and providing wood and water, she was peeling and slicing the potatoes and onions and mixing the pancake batter.

The breakfast was relished by all, and when Grant begged for a second slice of meat, Joe wanted to know whether he intended to create a famine on Braxton's Bar, just as there had been an increase of thirty per cent. or more in the population.

With little hope of recovering the stolen dust, it was arranged that Joe should summon the nearest physician, and immediately dispatch a township officer to Downieville, giving an account of the robbery, a description of the men concerned in it as nearly as Jennie could furnish it, and offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the robbers and recovery of the dust, or five thousand dollars for either. It was further agreed that Grant should be reported as dead. Believing Bement to be one of the robbers, Grant very reasonably concluded that such a report, for which he was fully prepared, and which he would not for a moment question, would prompt the assassin to act with more freedom, and lead him into indiscretions which might in the end result in his arrest and conviction. As it was some distance from the county seat, it was not deemed probable



that the report of the death would bring the coroner to the bar ; but if it did, Joe said he would show him Grant's grave, and induce him to hold an inquest without viewing the body.

"I guess I'll take the jack ; I may want to pack down something," remarked Joe, as his preparations were about completed for leaving. He spoke loud enough for Jennie to hear him, but she remained silent. She had left a small trunk and sachel in the cabin at Minnesota ; but to ask Joe to bring them down would indicate a disposition to remain where she was uninvited, and she scarcely knew what to say.

Joe appreciated the dilemma in which she was placed, and promptly relieved her of her embarrassment by saying :

"You had better remain here a few days, Miss Jennie, until the storm blows over. The chap you call your husband is too smart not to understand the part you took in this affair, and it might not be safe for you to be seen on the divide for a while. And, besides, I can't leave Grant alone, and don't see how we can get along without you just yet."

As his words recalled her lonely situation, Jennie's eyes filled with tears, and she bent her young head to the storm that hurtled around it.

"Now, don't do that unless you want me to smash something !" exclaimed Joe, working his fingers nervously, and feeling his heart coming up in his throat. "You're a brave girl, and have made

yourself homeless in tryin' to save us. As long as I've got a dollar, I'll ante for you, and so'll Grant. We'd be worse than Pawnees if we didn't; and by the jumpin' Jehu, I'll bait a wolf-trap with the man that lays a hand on you !"

Joe drew the sleeve of his woolen shirt across his eyes just as Jennie raised her head, and in the absence of a better means of diverting attention from a weakness of which he was ashamed, turned abruptly toward Grant and roared :

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you chip in and say something?"

Grant, who had been listening to the conversation, smiled in spite of himself; but before he could reply Jennie held out her hand to Joe, and looking up into his face, said :

"You are very kind, both of you, and I appreciate your goodness."

Joe held the soft hand in his broad palm for a moment, with the satisfaction of a boy slowly dissolving a sugar-plum in his mouth; then suddenly dropping it as if detected in a flagrant larceny, he glauced at Jennie's unseemly attire and said :

"These are not the kind of clothes you've been raised in, I reckon?"

Jennie smilingly informed him that it was the first time, and she hoped it would be the last, for her to appear in such a costume; that she had left a small trunk and sachel of her own clothing in a cabin at Minnesota, which she described, and would

esteem it a great favor if he would have them sent down, providing they had not been destroyed or removed.

"All right!" exclaimed Joe, delighted at the prospect of her remaining on the bar; "I'll be back along in the afternoon. There's plenty of grub in the cabin, and wood and water enough to last till I get back. So, don't go hungry."

In a few minutes Joe was moving up the cañon trail, driving the jack before him. Although he and his partner had been robbed of over three thousand ounces of gold dust the night before, with no probability of recovering a single pennyweight of it, there was no feeling of despondency in his heart as he mounted into the pure air of the divide. The dust had been the accumulation of but about four months of toil, and he knew there was more in the spot from which it had been taken; and he somehow felt, with no other calculation than a vague and involuntary estimate of the heart, that in the person of Jennie a nugget had been left behind worth more than all the gold of which they had been plundered.

Hence, he returned with a whistle the salutation of the mountain robin from the chapparal, and when his long-eared and ungainly servant stopped in the trail to awaken the echoes of the cañon with the harsh notes of his brazen lungs, Joe did not disturb the discordant blast, but rather invited its repetition by exclaiming:

"That's right ; make 'em know you're round ; yee-haw till you bu'st a blood-vessel ; you only cost thirty dollars !"

Joe proceeded directly to Forest City, and in half an hour after his arrival the constable of the township was on his way to Downieville, provided with the documents necessary to put the executive machinery of the county in motion for the arrest of the robbers. He also informed the officer that Grant Bouton had been brutally butchered in his bunk, but lived long enough to give a description of his murderers, and the name by which one of them, at least, was known. He did not clearly understand why Grant had advised an announcement of his death ; nevertheless, he followed the instruction, not doubting that some good reason for it would in time be developed.

After making a few purchases in Forest City, principally in the line of female apparel, he returned to Minnesota. Calling upon a physician and describing Grant's wounds, which were not considered dangerous, it was agreed that the doctor should visit Braxton's Bar the following morning. Receiving instructions how to treat the patient in the meantime, Joe added a few more bundles to his pack-saddle from the neighboring stores, and then started to the lower end of the village in search of the cabin described by Jennie. He found it without difficulty, for it was fifty yards from any other, and the chimney was topped with a headless pork-barrel. Shoving open the door, which was unlocked, Joe

entered and found Jennie's trunk and sachel undisturbed, and in a few minutes they added a picturesque feature to the miscellaneous burden under which the jack was staggering.

As every other article of clothing had been removed, it was evident that the robbers had visited the cabin on their return from Braxton's Bar, but had not remained long after discovering the absence of Jennie.

Joe took the German Bar trail, owing to the top-heavy condition of his cargo, and reached the cabin about the middle of the afternoon. It was a very thankful look that Jennie gave him as she opened the door to receive the trunk and sachel, which he had quietly lowered from the pack before his return was suspected.

"You do not know how thankful I am for all the trouble you have taken," said Jennie, removing her little effects to a corner of the cabin.

"No trouble at all," replied Joe. "I found the things without much of a scout, and the jack packed 'em down as if it was a pleasure to him. The trunk was a little awkward to pack, but if it had been a brick house it would have had to come down if you wanted it. But is everything all right with your traps?"

"Nothing has been disturbed, I believe," was the answer, "and I shall now be able to put myself in an attire that will not disgrace your little home."

"Disgrace?—disgrace?" exclaimed Joe, determined to stamp out the insinuation with becoming emphasis; "why, you wouldn't disgrace the finest house in the country if you had nothing on but a pair of stogies!"

"Why, Joe!" interrupted Jennie, stooping to open the trunk, and hide a smile at the thoughtless but somewhat extravagant expression.

"And—and—and other things!" stammered Joe. "And, talkin' of other things, I've got some of 'em," he continued, disappearing through the open door like a shot, and returning in a few minutes with an armful of miscellaneous wares, which he dumped upon the table.

"But how are you feelin'?" he said, turning to Grant and stooping kindly over the bunk. "The doctor'll be down in the mornin'."

"I have considerable pain, of course, but feel very much stronger, Joe," was the reply. "I begin to think I shall not be kept here very long, unless some new trouble is developed."

"Of course you won't! But I've got something here that may come in handy," continued Joe, stepping back to the table and looking shyly at Jennie. "I didn't know but they'd gone through your trunk; so, I brought a few odds and ends down in case of accident. I'm not much used to this particular kind of marketin', but reckon a trick or two may be hunted out of the pile that'll fit somewhere."

"What! did you bring these things for *me*, Joe!"

inquired Jennie, looking curiously at the packages on the table.

"Either for you or Grant," replied Joe, squinting in the direction of the latter, who was watching the proceeding with as much relish as his pains would permit.

"Here," continued Joe, opening and displaying the parcels, "is a bolt of caliker; and here's another of a little different stripe; and here's a gingerbread sort of stuff that would do on a pinch to go to meetin' in; and here's three or four pair o' shoes; I didn't know your number, and to make a sure thing of it, got 'em all the way from six inches to a foot in length. One pair I think would fit Grant, and his track in the mud looks like a half-dug grave, and I always feel like puttin' up a head-board when I see one of 'em."

"Now don't be cruel to a man who is unable to take his part," said Jennie, laughing at the outrageous comparison.

"Let him go on, Jennie," retorted Grant. "He never could get his feet in my boots."

"The vanity of that man is something awful, considerin' the situation he's in!" returned Joe, sorrowfully shaking his head. "Why, Jennie, his feet are so big, and cover so much ground in the bottom of the claim, that he has to use a long-handled shovel to git any dirt at all, unless he allows it to cave down on his boots. When he was a mere boy they had to make his shoes over a buckeye stump, and

when he kicked 'em out they used 'em for wheel-barrer beds. I know what I'm talkin' about, and know whether or not there ought to be straps and handles on the boots he's wearin' now, so that they could be moved round the cabin out of the way when he's not luggin' 'em along on his feet."

"That will do, Joe," said Grant; "I will admit any size you mention!"

"All right," replied Joe, pleased to see that Grant had been enlivened by his drollery; "but it took a heap of first-class testimony to make you do it." He then resumed his display of the parcels.

"And here's a bolt of muslin that will do for sheets and things, and a bundle of white flannel that'll make first-rate bandages for Grant's head; and here's a mattress tick that I intend to stuff with bunch grass if I can find enough in the cañon; and here's a couple o' pair of white blankets, that can be used round the cabin somewhere, Jennie; and here's some combs, and buttons, and thread, and needles, and pins, and scented slops for handkerchiefs, and hair grease, and double-jointed socks, and——"

But Grant could stand the description no longer, and interrupted it with a fit of laughter which could not be suppressed, notwithstanding the pain that followed.

"What do you know about such things?" roared Joe, half annoyed at the interruption. "I'll leave



it to Jennie if reg'lar double-gear'd two-story socks ain't just the thing."

"I guess you have made no mistake, Joe," Jennie replied, finding herself directly appealed to.

"Of course I'm right," returned Joe, triumphantly. "And here's a long string of punched and scalloped stuff to tack round the edges of—of——"

"Of what, Joe?" interrupted Grant, observing his hesitation.

"See here, young man!" said Joe, shaking his finger warningly at the patient; "the doctor told me he would be here in the mornin', and to keep you quiet till then! And here," he continued, reserving his most stunning purchase for the last, "is a bonnet of the latest style, beautifully fricaseed with ribbons and flabbergasted with flowers, and lace and things. In order that it might be jammed only in one way, I flattened it out and packed it between a couple of these bolts of cloth."

He opened the frail thing as he would a bear-trap, smashing it together the other way to restore it to its original shape, held it up and exclaimed:

"What do you think of it?"

"It looks as if a herd of cattle had run over it!" was Grant's crushing comment.

"You're feverish and out of your head, Grant," growled Joe; "you've been gabbin' too much;" and he passed the bonnet to Jennie, who soothed him by declaring that all his purchases were useful,

and he had displayed excellent judgment in their selection.

"Speaking of bonnets, Joe," said Grant, "how many hats do you usually wear at the same time?"

"Oh, yes; I forgot to tell you," replied Joe, pulling his hat from his head and removing another which he had slipped over it. "I picked this up below the trail, at the lower end of the bar as I was comin' along, and I think Jennie ought to know something about it."

"Me?" inquired Jennie.

"Yes, you," returned Joe. "The man you shot at last night fell, didn't he?"

"Yes," admitted Jennie.

"And dropped something, and went off without his hat?" continued Joe.

"It is possible, although I did not distinctly observe," was the answer, "for after firing I was considerably excited, and partially secreted myself behind the rocks."

"Now, let me tell you exactly what happened," said Joe, holding up the hat and exhibiting two bullet-holes through the crown. "Your shot passed through the hat, grazing the head of the rascal deep enough to knock him down. In falling, he not only lost his hat among the rocks, but dropped and smashed one of the bottles of dust he was luggin' away. He didn't stop for either when he crawled to his feet, but broke down the trail as if a battery was about to be turned loose on him. You can see

what sort of a shot you made, for there's hair and bits of the scalp round the hole where the bullet went out."

"You must be right," said Jennie, her face growing a shade paler as she examined the hat. "He had a narrow escape!"

"If he didn't, I'm a groun' hog!" returned Joe, exhibiting the hat to Grant and then tossing it upon a shelf. "Now, Jennie, before you change your toggery, we'll take a pan and a couple of horns, and go down and scrape up the dust before any one else finds it. I don't think it's scattered much, and Grant won't mind bein' left alone a little while, especially when we're on such business."

Grant was very much interested, of course, in these discoveries, and requested them to go at once, declaring that he felt almost well enough to accompany them.

Repairing to the spot, they found the fragments of the bottle among some loose bowlders three or four feet below the trail, while for a yard or more around the intervening earth was yellow with gold—so yellow, in fact, that it had attracted Joe's attention as he stooped to pick up the hat lying near.

Carefully removing such of the small bowlders as were not embedded in the earth, the gold, mingled with soil and sand, was scraped together and thrown into the pan. It was Jennie's first experience in gold mining, and in her enthusiasm she expressed a determination to follow it as a business

thereafter, forgetting for the moment that it was the circumstance of a broken bottle, and not the tardy action of the elements, that had created the rich deposit.

After half an hour's delightful toil, Joe announced that the cream of the little claim had been skimmed, and that he would some day, perhaps, make a clean up with a rocker of the few remaining ounces scattered beyond the reach of the horn. The pan was almost filled with gold and sand, and as Jennie ran her fingers through the glittering mass, her lowest estimate of the value was fifty thousand dollars.

"Why, fifty thousand dollars would weigh about two hundred and fifty pounds," said Joe. "You've made a wild guess."

"Then there can't be so much," replied Jennie, feeling that she had in some manner been defrauded. "Well, what is your guess, Joe?"

"There's not much guess-work about it," was the answer. "But one bottle was smashed, and as we've scraped up the most of the dust—in fact, all but a very few ounces—there can't be over five or six thousand dollars in the pan."

"Well, that's pretty good, isn't it?" inquired Jennie, innocently.

"A good deal better'n the kick of a mule," said Joe, lifting the heavy pan to his shoulder. "As it will take some time to pan this down, I won't ask you to go to the river with me."

"If you think you can do the work properly without me," replied Jennie, mischievously, "I will return to the cabin;" which she accordingly did, while Joe seated himself on a rock in a quiet eddy of the stream, and proceeded with the delicate task of separating the gold from the soil, sand and gravel with which it was mingled.

It was almost sundown when Joe returned to the cabin, with something over a quart of tolerably clean dust in the pan.

"Thanks to Jennie, we have recovered something," said Grant, cheerfully, tipping and looking into the pan which Joe had placed on the bunk beside him.

"Yes, and it's hers whenever she wants it," continued Joe. "Do you hear *that*, Jennie?"

"I hear you talking very foolishly about the gold dust in that pan," said Jennie.

"No foolishness at all about it," insisted Joe. "Didn't you save it?"

"Possibly," argued Jennie; "but do those who save or recover the property of others usually retain it?"

"Yes," answered Joe, "if the owner wants to, give it to 'em."

"And they are willing to accept, which is not the case in this instance," returned Jennie, seriously. "But I appreciate your generosity just as much as if it was proper for me to accept as a gift without

consideration a large quantity of gold dust which I would not know what to do with."

"All right ; but we shan't forget that you've got an interest in it, whether you claim it or not. But isn't it a nice little pile?" continued Joe, holding out the pan for Jennie's inspection.

"Beautiful !" she exclaimed with enthusiasm, making a little furrow through the damp dust with her finger. "One feels almost like eating the precious stuff."

"That's just the way I feel," said Joe ; but he was thinking of Jennie and not of the gold in the pan ; for during his absence at the river she had substituted a neatly-fitting dress of her own for the slouchy male attire in which he had last seen her ; and with her luxuriant hair becomingly dressed, and her feet tidily encased in the smallest pair of gaiters found among Joe's purchases, she looked sweeter to him than all the gold dust on Braxton's Bar.

"But isn't it very fine?" inquired Jennie, alluding to the character of the dust.

"Finer than winter otter pelt !" responded Joe, shyly glancing at her face from under the broad brim of his wool hat.

"But it is very handsome, nevertheless," continued Jennie.

"Puttier than a speckled mule !" added Joe, glancing again at her face, to which had mounted a

roguish red at his manifest evasion of her simple questions.

"But see what I have done!" she exclaimed, abruptly changing a subject which Joe had treated so obscurely. In a corner of the cabin, inclosing one of the bunks, she had hastily pinned together the breadths of one of the bolts of calico, and partitioned off a little apartment of her own.

"First rate!" said Joe, in admiration of her ingenuity. "Now, if you'll hash up the meat and flapjacks for supper, I'll fix you up a bunk before dark that'll just make you sleepy to look at." And crowding under his arm the mattress tick he had exhibited, and an empty fifty-pound flour sack, he provided himself with a large butcher knife and started for the upper end of the flat. As the summer was far advanced, he found an abundance of dry grass, with which he was not long in stuffing both sack and mattress.

Returning to the cabin with the mattress on his head, and looking, as Jennie laughingly informed him, like an animated hay-stack, he re-arranged the bunk bottom, and placed upon it the mattress, which he smoothed down in keeping with his own idea of comfort. He next covered the mattress with a pair of heavy blankets, over which he spread the two pairs of white blankets, fine and soft in texture, which he had brought down that morning. Then tying the open end of the flour sack, which he had filled with the softest grass to be found on the flat,

he placed it at the head of the bunk for a pillow, and invited Jennie to an inspection of her new quarters.

She was delighted with the clean and exceedingly comfortable bed which Joe had provided, and tears came to her eyes as she observed the earnestness and delicacy with which he had striven to banish from her mind all thought of her equivocal position.

If Jennie was delighted with her bed, so were both Joe and Grant with the supper which she had quietly prepared. She had washed the knives and forks, scoured the tin plates and cups, and over the rough and greasy table had spread two breadths of white muslin pinned together. Instead of the supper of meat, muddy coffee and greasy and indigestible pancakes, which they had expected, Jennie drew the table close enough to Grant's bunk to enable him to help himself from the side, and then placed upon the white cloth a plate of light biscuit; three or four slices of steak nicely broiled; a plate of fried onions; a dish of bacon, fried and served with a flour gravy which made an acceptable substitute for butter; a plate of thinly-sliced fried potatoes; a pot of bright and clear coffee, and a small pan of stewed Chili peaches, which at that time came to California in round, pressed cakes, about the size of a tea-saucer, and were regarded as a great luxury.

As Jennie sat down at the table, flushed with



exercise, and looking sweeter than the stewed peaches at her elbow, Joe could not remember that he had ever before been tempted with such an array of delicacies.

"Where did you get all these things, Jennie?" he inquired, in amazement. "Some of 'em must have come down in your trunk to-day."

"All these things!" repeated Jennie. "Why, in the cabin, of course. One would think you were sitting down to a royal banquet!"

"That's just the name for it!" declared Joe, cutting in pieces a slice of meat for Grant, "and if there's any better grub in this world, I don't want it!"

Jennie laughed heartily at Joe's enthusiasm over the simple meal, but it was altogether too genuine to be repressed by any such proceeding.

"If I could remember Uncle Duke Hawkins's blessin', which I used to hear often enough when I was a boy," said Joe, "I'm a Pawnee papoose if I didn't pepper these victuals with it!"

"Try to think of it, Joe," urged Jennie, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Yes," chimed in Grant; "let us see how much of a Christian you have been in your younger days."

"Well," said Joe, clearing his throat of half a biscuit by sluicing through it a swallow of coffee, "since you're sort o' darin' me, I'll hit it a lick. I think it commenced about this wise: Now I lay me down to——"

"Oh, oh!" interrupted Jennie.

"You're right," resumed Joe; "I'm a little off on it; that's the beginnin' of an old camp-meetin' song. Come to think of it, it started off with, Give us this day our daily bread——"

"And gravy!" interrupted Grant, solemnly.

"No gravy about it!" growled Joe; "our daily bread, and—and—and hearts of gratitude—hearts of gratitude!" he repeated, emphatically, feeling that he had prospected around until he had struck the old streak—"that we may hog with humility—with humility, and thankfulness—the truck that we are about to pitch into. Amen!" And Joe leaned back with triumph.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Jennie, applauding on the table with her knife-handle. "We will have that before every meal hereafter."

"Not much!" returned Joe. "That's only for great occasions like this. But if I haven't soured your stomachs, turn loose!"

"It has rather sharpened my appetite," said Grant; "and now, Joe, if you will pass me one of those biscuits, with a little gravy on one side and a thin layer of that blessing on the other, I will try to prevail upon Jennie to sing the doxology after you have swallowed the remainder."

It is hoped that in after years they all sat down to many pleasant suppers; but it is safe to say that not one of them ever forgot the first they ate together on Braxton's Bar.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *Grant's Physician—Work Resumed—Joe Contracts a Heart Disease.*



QUITE early the next morning, considering the distance traveled, the physician employed by Joe at Minnesota knocked at the door of the cabin.

Grant had spent an uncomfortable night. The pain in his left hip and leg had increased, until at times it became almost unendurable, and an accelerated pulse and constant thirst gave unmistakable indications of the presence of fever. Had the pain been in the right hip, above which the bullet entered, it might have been readily accounted for; but Joe was at a loss to understand what direct sympathy there could be between the left leg and a wound in the right side. Under the circumstances, he began to regard the symptoms with some degree of alarm, when the physician put in his welcome appearance.

"Mighty glad to see you, Doc!" exclaimed Joe, warmly grasping him by the hand. "You're just in time, for I was beginnin' to feel a little uneasy. Doctor Bingham, allow me to introduce Miss Newland,

my half sister. And here, doctor, is your patient, Mr. Bouton, who has had a pretty lively rough-and-tumble with some chaps who wanted to do a little prospectin' in the corner of the cabin."

Grant extended his hand, the wrist of which was without a second motion grasped with such professional accuracy by the doctor that his fingers covered the pulse.

"You have a little fever," he remarked, after a pause, "but it is more the result of nervousness than anything else. Now, let me look at your wounds."

Jennie provided a basin of warm water, and the wounds were carefully washed and examined. The one on the head was doing well, and the doctor announced that the skull had not been injured; but the course of the bullet which had entered the side could not be traced beyond the spine, and the doctor was profoundly puzzled.

"I think it is lodged somewhere about the spine," he remarked, again pressing his fingers slowly around the body; "but we may have to wait for local irritation to indicate the precise spot."

"You're sure it's in there somewhere, Doc?" inquired Joe.

"Certainly, my friend; certainly!" replied the physician, emphatically. "Where could it have passed out?"

"It might 'a gone clear round the body, and come out o' the same hole it went in at," suggested Joe, half in earnest.

"You are imaginative," replied the doctor, looking curiously at Joe. "Medical history fails to record any such eccentricity in the course of missiles projected into the human body."

"I'm talkin' about bullets," returned Joe, a little piqued at the doctor's selection of terms.

"And so am I," was the assurance of the doctor.

"Then another edition of the book ought to be got out at once," remarked Joe, "for I tell you just such things have happened. Bullets take the strangest kind of directions sometimes. I shot and killed a black wolf on the Sweetwater, a few years ago, and couldn't tell where I'd hit it till I skinned the head, when I found that the ball had gone into the right nostril and come out of the left ear, without cuttin' a hair."

The doctor's only response was an incredulous stare.

"Yes, sir, that's so!" resumed Joe. "And in a skirmish with a band of Sioux on the South Platte, when I was comin' across, one of our party was shot in the shoulder as he was crawlin' through the brush, and we dug the bullet out of his boot-heel."

"If that is the case," said the doctor, "with assumed seriousness, 'it is not impossible that we may find the bullet in this instance under the patient's great toe-nail! But, in any event, the way to find it is to search for it. What is the character of the distress you feel in your left side?'" he continued, turning to the patient.

"The pains are not exactly in the left side, doctor," replied Grant, "but rather in the left hip and leg, and are exceedingly sharp and distressing at times."

"In the left hip—sharp and distressing !" mused the doctor. "Is it possible that the sciatic nerve has been touched ?"

Turning Grant partially on his face, the doctor proceeded to press his fingers firmly along the muscles of the back above the left hip, until a sharp expression of pain from the patient arrested the movement.

"I was right !" exclaimed the doctor, triumphantly. "Here it is !" And taking a case of instruments from his pocket, he made a shallow incision, and a moment after held up the bullet, which had been but slightly flattened in its passage around the body.

"Here it is, sure enough," said Joe, taking the bullet from the doctor and examining it curiously ; "but how in the name of heaven did it git there ?"

"By almost as strange a journey as that by which the bullet reached the boot-heel of your companion," maliciously replied the doctor. "But I will answer your question, for this is a very curious case. The bullet entered the right side sufficiently low to be diverted downward by the ribs, and passed around the body under the skin and cellular tissues, over the crest of the ilium and under the

gluteus maximus of the left side, where it finally lodged, injuring the great sciatic nerve."

"Ex-act-ly!" drawled Joe. "There's just where I thought it had brought up; but until you explained the thing, I had no idea that in gittin' to the big skyrocket nerve it had to charge up and down the backbone once or twice, and then scoot through the liver and about fourteen times round the body. But, as I said before, bullets take strange courses sometimes, and I reckon you're ready to believe that wolf story now."

"Yes, or any other," smilingly replied the doctor, appreciating Joe's rejoinder to his purely professional explanation. "You are all right now," he continued, addressing Grant. "Your wounds are not at all serious, and will soon heal. Eat moderately of anything your appetite craves, but remain as quiet as possible for a few days. I must say that your escape from death was little less than marvelous. In ninety-nine cases in a hundred the result of such an assault would be fatal."

As the doctor was preparing for his departure, Joe handed him a liberal package of dust, and following him to the door, requested that he would mention to no one his visit to the bar, as, for reasons involving the possible recovery of the gold of which they had been robbed, it was deemed prudent not to correct the report then in circulation, that Grant had died from the effects of his wounds. The doctor promised to comply with the request; but

the real object of it, and the whereabouts, during the robbery and murderous assault upon Grant, of the young lady whom Joe had introduced as his half sister, were mysteries which furnished abundant food for speculation as the doctor allowed his horse to pick his way slowly along the trail leading back to Minnesota.

"How pleasant it is to find a long-lost brother away up in the mountains of California!" said Jennie, as Joe re-entered the cabin. "It is very romantic."

"That's so!" replied Joe; "but I threw you up against the doctor in that shape to get rid of a whole string of ugly questions and suspicions. Don't you see?"

"It was very thoughtful," returned Jennie; "but don't you wish I really *was* your sister, Joe?"

"Hardly!" Joe slowly answered, giving her a look that promptly closed the conversation.

It was not long before the pain left the hip from which the bullet had been extracted, and Grant's recovery was rapid. In the meantime Joe was not idle, and at the end of a week after the robbery, many changes had occurred on Braxton's Bar. Satisfied that Grant's restoration to health was only a question of a few days of quiet, Joe went energetically to work to replace the snug little fortune of which they had been plundered, and which he believed would never be recovered.

Although the yield of their last week's work had



been less than usual, and the dust was becoming finer and more difficult to save as they breasted toward the river, Joe had faith that there was many a pound of gold still left in the old channel, and his aim was to extract it as speedily as possible, and before the approaching winter rains, which might be expected as early as the latter part of October, turned the quiet stream into a roaring and unmanageable torrent, and flooded for a long season the lower and more valuable part of their claim.

To do this, however, better appliances and more hands were required, and with Grant's concurrence Joe had decided to employ three or four good miners, bring a small stream of water down the flat, and work the claim through a line of sluices.

It was not a very easy matter to divert from the river the amount of water required for the sluices, but it was finally accomplished by putting in a light dam, composed of two parallel walls of bowlders about four feet apart and filled between with soil from the flat, from the outer edge of the upper part of the bar to a large rock diagonally up and near the center of the main channel. This raised the water very considerably at the upper end of the bar, and a ditch two or three feet in depth at the point of diversion started the water down the flat.

A small wing to the cabin, with an intervening door, had been constructed for Jennie's accommodation, and additional bunks put up along

the sides of the main room for the use of the three men added to the family.

Jennie's room was not more than eight feet square, but it was lined with the muslin which Joe had purchased for other purposes, had a glass window of six small panes, and was altogether a very cozy little spot, with its wide, comfortable bed, white sheets and soft blankets, and a covered table with quite a pretentious mirror above it.

The lumber for these improvements and the sluices had been packed down the trail from the shake factory on the backs of the men, while the donkey had been employed in supplying the cabin with additional knives and forks, crockery, cooking utensils and provisions.

Everything being in readiness for the resumption of work in the claim, Joe insisted upon the employment of a Chinese cook, who had been selected for him by Scully; but Jennie would not listen to the proposition. She said it would be impossible for her to remain idle, and declared that she would resume her male attire and work in the claim unless allowed to do the cooking. Joe was compelled to yield; but so generously was she assisted by all, that the duty was comparatively light.

Joe's assumption of being Jennie's half-brother was continued, and so unquestionably accepted, that before the end of the first week of his sojourn on the bar the only single man of the three employed

had offered himself in marriage. Without an idea of seriously entertaining the proposal, in a spirit either of coquetry or mischief she referred the infatuated miner to her "brother Joe"—a reference which she afterwards regretted, for it resulted in his discharge, and the employment of a much less agreeable man in his place.

When he approached the self-constituted half-brother on the subject, he satisfactorily established that he was connected with a wealthy and influential Pennsylvania family, and was not destitute of means. He avowed an honorable affection for Jennie, and ventured the opinion that she was not averse to the proposal.

But Joe's wrath increased with these exhibitions of the applicant's earnestness and eligibility, and he savagely threatened to carve him into fish-bait if he ever mentioned the matter again, and concluded by advising him to pack his blankets at once and move on to some other camp where his life would be in less danger. "Don't you hesitate a minute," said Joe, as a final and terrible warning. "I've killed three men within the past six months for makin' the same proposal, and don't want to murder another!"

The man left the same day—and little wonder that he did, considering the character of the interview—and the evening following found Joe looking as solemn as a funeral procession. He swallowed his supper in silence, and then wore the twi-





light out sitting on a log back of the cabin and whittling a shingle in shavings.

If no one else knew what was the matter, Jennie did, and was annoyed at herself for not having declined the offer and remained silent. Completing her after-supper work, she leisurely strolled away from the cabin, apparently for the purpose of enjoying the cool evening breeze, but really to find what had become of Joe. After a little search she suddenly discovered him, not six feet away, sitting on the log from which he had not moved for almost an hour.

"Why, Joe, is that you?" she exclaimed in an assumed tone of surprise. "Where have you been since supper?"

"Oh, knockin' round the flat," he replied, slipping down from the log.

"I thought it possible," said Jennie, innocently, "that you had gone up to the divide for a sack of potatoes, as we have but few left; or for a side of bacon; or for another man to take the place of the one who left this afternoon; or for——"

"See here, Jennie!" interrupted Joe, in a tone of mingled reproach and desperation; "what did you send that man to me for?"

"What man?" she inquired, happy that it was too dark for him to notice the smile on her lips which she could not repress.

"What man?" repeated Joe; "why, the impudent idiot who wanted to marry you!"

"Marry me!" exclaimed Jennie. "Why, I am married already, and have but the word of a villain that the ceremony was illegally performed."

"Well, what did you send him to me for, then?" persisted Joe, with manifest irritation.

"Because I thought that would be the easiest way to get rid of him," replied Jennie, with a feeling of remorse.

"Well, you come pretty near gittin' rid of him, I can tell you," resumed Joe, "for if he'd a' pressed the business, I'd a' broke every bone in his carcass, just as sure as you've got a winker to your left eye!"

A mischievous laugh was Jennie's only reply.

"Then it was only a joke?" suggested Joe, with a feeling of infinite relief.

"What else could it be?" was the reply.

"And you don't care anything about him?" returned Joe; "you're sure you don't?"

"Of course not, Joe," Jennie answered softly. "Why should I care for him?"

"Then I reckon I've made a fool of myself," said Joe, "but I couldn't help it. It seems to me somehow, Jennie, that we've been acquainted for about thirteen years, and—and—and I don't want you to leave the cabin while I'm here; and I should like to see the color of the man's eyebrows that would think o' takin' you away! That's the true slapjack, with bacon grease on both sides!"

Joe's heart began to act strangely, and he

abruptly said : "But you ain't mad at me, are you, Jennie, because I treated that chap a little rough?"

"Angry with *you*, Joe?" replied Jennie; confidently extending her hand. "How could I be?"

Joe took the proffered hand, hardly daring to close his rough fingers around it, and drawing it under his arm, held it there until they reached the cabin, his heart throbbing loud enough, it seemed to him, to be heard across the flat.

With a small bucket hand-pump the claim was relieved of its accumulation of water, and from the bottom were removed the bowlders that had been loosened from the sides and washed down. The sluices were so placed that the gravel could be shoveled directly into them from the breasts of the opening, and were supplied with water through a line of stout canvas hose connected with the ditch.

Active operations in the old channel were resumed the same morning that Grant first took his seat in the doorway after the murderous assault upon him. He was steadily recovering his strength, and informed Joe that he would be with him in the claim before the end of another week.

It was not known how much energy had been displayed by the officers in their pursuit of the plunderers of Braxton's Bar ; but no arrests had been made or gold recovered, and the inference was that the malefactors had made good their escape.

Accounts of the robbery had found their way into the newspapers, including the intelligence that



Grant Bouton had died from the effects of his wounds, and that a young and beautiful woman, who had not been seen since the robbery, was presumed to have been the leader of the desperate raid.

One of these accounts Joe had noticed in the columns of the *Sacramento Union* while on a business errand to the divide, and had procured and quietly placed a copy of the paper in the hands of Grant. The strange story was also read by Jennie, and among the three, for many days thereafter, the reporter's sudden transformation of Grant into a corpse and Jennie into the leader of a band of highwaymen, was a source of quiet merriment.

Knowing that the story would find circulation in the Atlantic journals, and might possibly reach the eye of his sister, Grant had written to Martha as soon as he was able, inclosing the account clipped from the *Union*, and imparting the joyous information that he was rapidly recovering, and would again be at work in a few days, and soon make good their losses. He at the same time emphatically requested her to make no mention of his recovery, either by letter or otherwise, beyond the family of the good aunt with whom she was making her home, and upon whom he enjoined the same secrecy. "I am especially desirous," he wrote, "that no correction of the published account shall reach Brinton. I have very important reasons for this, and they will be entirely satisfactory to you when I

make the explanation in person, which I hope to do before many months."

After an exhaustive but entirely unsatisfactory interchange of surmises by the family, it was unanimously concluded that the puzzling request had not been lightly made by Grant, and should be strictly complied with.

As Grant sat in the open door of the cabin, that bright August morning, listening to the sound of labor on the claim and the thoughtless warblings of Jennie at her work, the world looked bright to him again, as it always does to the convalescent. He thought the skies were clearer and the pine leaves greener than he had ever seen them before, and wondered why he had not until then noticed a palisade resembling the ruins of an old castle, on the opposite side of the river.

Finishing her morning's work, Jennie seated herself near him at the door, and chatted pleasantly while she ran up the seams of a wrapper from the gaudy roll of calico which Joe thought would "do on a pinch to go to meetin' in."

"This is one of Joe's purchases, isn't it, Jennie?" inquired Grant, pointing to the calico in her lap.

"Yes," replied Jennie, smiling at the pattern. "It is a little ostentatious in color, but I can make use of it."

"Do so," said Grant; "it will please Joe. By the way, Jennie," he continued, "what do you think of Joe?"

"Why, I think he is one of the best men in the world," she frankly replied. "But why do you ask such a question?"

"Because I am very much attached to him, and am beginning to observe that you might make him exceedingly miserable by thinking of him otherwise than as you do."

"Then you have observed what has escaped me," remarked Jennie, after a pause long enough for a succession of lights and shadows to play around her heart.

"Possibly," said Grant.

"Personal experience must have assisted you in the discovery," suggested Jennie, with a mischievous glance at Grant's face.

"Perhaps!" And the smile left his lips as he spoke.

"Perhaps is equivocal," continued Jennie. "Then there must be some doubt about it."

"I hope so," was the unsatisfactory answer.

"From all of which I am permitted to infer that you have *possibly* observed something which I have not, owing to a personal experience which you have *perhaps* had, but which you *hope* you haven't!" And Jennie laughed until Grant was compelled to join her, and then added: "Can a man love without knowing it?"

"I am not sure about that, Jennie; but can you not conceive it possible for a man to hope that he does not love, when to love is to love without hope?"

"I really hope you are not in that desperate condition," laughed Jennie.

"I sometimes think I am," was the half serious answer.

"Well, the doubt in your own heart will save it from breaking, Grant, and before Joe gets beyond that point, he will probably know enough about me to care but little what I may think of him."

Grant was foolish enough to wonder what Jennie meant. But she did not stop to explain, but rose and poured a dipper of water into a kettle of beans over the fire, and did not return until his thoughts had strayed into other channels.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *Mark's Appearance on Braxton's Bar.—His Meeting with Grant.*



MONG the many who read the published accounts of the robbery on Braxton's Bar and the death of Grant Bouton, was our eccentric acquaintance, Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs. He was in Grass Valley at the time, undecided whether to turn North or South in his dreamy and almost aimless journeyings among the hills.

Work was no hardship to Mark ; but the incentive to exertion no longer existed, and he was content to float leisurely down the stream of apathy upon which he had deliberately embarked, heedless of the direction in which he was thoughtlessly drifting.

He did not know that Grant Bouton was in California, and the dreadful intelligence smote him like an electric shock. As Grant had left Brinton, it was probable, Mark argued, that Martha was no longer there, and he felt assured that she had not received his letters.

It required but a moment for him to determine what to do. He decided to start at once for Braxton's Bar, and at the scene of the murder gather the particulars of Grant's death, and possibly ascertain the address of Martha. Besides, as a very large amount of gold had been stolen from the cabin, it was not improbable that Grant had left other property, which it was his duty to secure to the sister, if possible.

Throwing his sachel over his shoulder—for he had somewhere lost the leathern saddle-bags with which he had crossed the plains, by lending them to a friend who had forgotten to return them—and leaving his blankets to be given to the first needy miner, in less than an hour Mark was on his way to Minnesota Flat. He took the most direct route, crossing the South Yuba at the mouth of Rush Creek and the Middle Fork at Dickman's Ferry. Now stimulated by an inspiring purpose, he climbed the steep acclivities of the Yubas without halting, and scarcely knew sleep or rest until he reached his destination.

He arrived at Minnesota about the middle of the afternoon of the second day, and ascertained that the nearest route to Braxton's Bar was by way of the cañon trail, and that Grant's partner was still there.

Refreshed by a cup of coffee and a few minutes rest, Mark re-shouldered his sachel and started for the river. The trail had been considerably broadened by recent use, and he followed it without difficulty,

and in half an hour after turning south from the main road at the shake factory, stood looking down on Braxton's Bar.

Although more than an hour of daylight remained when he reached the mouth of the cañon back of the cabin, the sun had dropped behind the hills, and a soft twilight began to creep up from the river and spread its misty mantle over the narrow valley.

The miners were still at their work, and immediately below him, partially hidden by intervening clumps of chaparral, was the cabin which had been the home of Grant Bouton, and which Mark believed had been the scene of his cruel death.

Believing the cabin to be vacant for the time, as there were no signs of life around it, he walked slowly down and seated himself beside a large pine which had been left standing about twenty feet in the rear of the building, where he concluded to await the return of the miners from the river.

Below him the waters sang their quiet song of summer, while above his head the pine leaves responded in drowsy monotone to the whispers of the evening breeze. It was music that Mark loved, and taking the flute from his sachel and placing the sections together, he raised the instrument to his lips, and out upon the cool and quiet air floated its mellow tones. But the cabin was not tenantless, and Mark soon had two curious and appreciative listeners. Grant, whose strength was increasing daily, was

answering a letter which he had received from Martha the day before, while Jennie was engaged in the preliminary preparations for the evening meal.

As the first notes of the instrument reached them, Grant leaned back from the table upon which he was writing, and Jennie stood still with the upraised knife in her hand with which she was slicing a strip of bacon.

"A troubadour," said Grant, "who has discovered your retreat on Braxton's Bar!"

"An Orpheus, rather, who is piping for his own amusement," replied Jennie. "But whoever he may be, he plays divinely. Listen!" And placing a finger upon her lips, she advanced a few steps and stopped before the open door.

Mark had finished the melody which had excited Jennie's admiration, and to which Grant had paid but little attention, and had struck the first notes of "The Last Rose of Summer." It was skillfully given, and in its tenderness seemed to express the emotions of a sympathetic heart; and as the soft voice of the instrument was wafted into the cabin, with a look which resembled terror almost as much as astonishment, Grant mechanically laid the pen upon the table and slowly rose to his feet.

Advancing noiselessly toward the door, and stretching his ear to catch every note, he breathlessly listened until the music ceased; then grasping the arm of Jennie, who was half frightened at his earnestness, he whispered:



"I have not heard it for years, but I believe I know the voice of that instrument ; and if I am not dreaming, the player is Mark Briggs !"

"Who is Mark Briggs ?" inquired Jennie, curiously.

"The one man I would see above all others on earth !" replied Grant, earnestly. "But whoever he may be, invite him in, for the man who can make such music is entitled to a welcome anywhere."

Jennie proceeded around the cabin, and timidly approached the minstrel. As she did so, Mark hastily replaced the flute in his sachel and rose to his feet. Had the ghost of his grandmother suddenly appeared before him, he would not have been more astonished.

"Good-evening, sir !" began Jennie, instinctively observing that she was in the presence of a man who knew something of the proprieties of life.

"Good-evening, ma'am !" returned Mark, politely, advancing a step or two. "I was not aware that I had a listener."

"You have had more than one," said Jennie, with a smile which placed him completely at his ease, "and would scarcely regret the serenade if you knew how greatly it was appreciated."

"Since it seems to have pleased you, I am more than satisfied," returned Mark, gallantly.

"Will you walk in?" continued Jennie, still more impressed with the stranger's agreeable manners.

"Thank you," replied Mark, reaching for his sachel and following her to the door.

As he entered the cabin he was politely welcomed by Grant and invited to a seat ; and as he carelessly tossed his sachel into a corner and seated himself on a stool near the door, Grant scanned him closely, but failed to recognize in his bearded face and long hair the features of his old friend. Grant had undergone a change quite as marked since his departure from Brinton, and his identity was not even suspected.

"I have visited the bar," said Mark, removing his slouch hat as he observed the presence of Jennie, who was busily engaged in preparing supper, "for the purpose of learning something of the particulars of the death of Grant Bouton, who was robbed and murdered in this cabin, I presume, since there seems to be no other on the bar, ten or twelve days ago."

Not greatly startled at the announcement of his own death, Grant quietly inquired : "Did you know Grant Bouton?"

"Yes, I knew him," replied Mark.

"And did Grant Bouton know you?" was the question that followed.

"Yes," continued Mark, nodding his head thoughtfully, with his eyes to the floor ; "he knew me."

"And, notwithstanding your long hair and whiskers, since he has heard your voice Grant

Bouton knows you yet!" he exclaimed, rising and holding out both hands to his bewildered visitor. "You are Mark Briggs!"

With eyes almost dazed with amazement, and a creeping sensation down his back, Mark slowly rose from the stool, and in a tone strange to himself, said :

"I admit that I am Mark Briggs ; but do you tell me that you are Grant Bouton ?"

"Yes," was the joyous answer ; "I am Grant Bouton, the brother of Martha, and your friend !—the man whom the robbers failed to kill, but the newspapers, with his approval, in good faith, but I hope in sorrow, cruelly assassinated !"

"Let me feel that you are flesh and blood," exclaimed Mark, seizing Grant's hands, and then, "Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace !"

"Now, Mark," said Grant, pulling a couple of stools together near the door, "tell me all about yourself ; how you came to California, what you have done since you have been here, and what you think of doing hereafter."

"First, tell me where and how Martha is," replied Mark, "and why she has never answered one of my letters."

"She is with her aunt in Buffalo, and was well when I last heard from her. She probably did not receive your letters because you directed them to Brinton ; but you would be satisfied that she has not forgotten you if you knew how often she has inquired about you in her letters to me."

Mark's face became radiant in a moment, and then a cloud swept across it, as he half whispered: "She is still Martha Bouton, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," replied Grant, smiling at his earnestness; "she is still Martha Bouton, and I am not aware that she has any idea of changing the name very soon."

Mark rose to his feet, walked to the corner as if on some very important business, moved his sachel about six inches, and then returned to his seat.

"But you have not told me about yourself, Mark," persisted Grant.

"That would be a long story," was the musing reply; "a very long story; but, to sum it all up, I came to California across the continent, have been engaged in mining the most of the time, have *cached* a comfortable nest-egg, and for the last few months have been drifting around like an autumn leaf, caring but little where the wind might leave me.

"While in Grass Valley I saw the published account of your murder, and came here to weep over your grave. Now that you have my story, tell me of the robbery, of how you happened to escape alive, and more especially of the beautiful brigand who ravaged your exchequer. Now, had you only managed to capture her, the dust would not be missed, for beautiful brigands, above all things, are what romantic young men like yourself sigh for."

"Oh, I caged her!" said Grant; "there she is, with her arms up to her elbows in dough!"

Jennie had been a silent but interested spectator of the recognition of the two friends, and not doubting that she had been one of their subjects of conversation, her hand trembled a little in the dough she was kneading as Mark approached for an introduction.

"Allow me to introduce to you the beautiful brigand referred to by the newspapers," said Grant. "Miss Newland, permit me to present to you my old friend, Mr. Briggs—Mr. Mark Briggs!"

"Mr. Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs, to be exact!" added Mark, bowing politely.

Jennie bowed, smiled and blushed over her dough; and, catching her eye, with a mischievous look Mark continued:

"Miss Newland and myself are not exactly strangers. We have met before."

"Indeed!" said Grant, with an air of genuine surprise. "May I ask where?"

"Certainly!" replied Mark. "Behind the cabin, a few minutes ago!"

"Then you ought to be old friends by this time!" suggested Grant.

"With Miss Newland's permission, we *will* be old friends if we live long enough," said Mark.

"With all my heart, Mr. Briggs," returned Jennie.

"With all your heart!" exclaimed Grant, with feigned astonishment. "That means a great deal, Jennie!"

"Since Mr. Briggs will not be apt to misconstrue the expression, I see no necessity for amending it," was the sharp retort.

"Nor I," volunteered Mark ; " particularly, since it seems to annoy Grant."

The men laughingly returned to the seats, leaving Jennie to her work, when Grant proceeded to give the details, so far as they had been gathered, of the robbery of the cabin and determined assault upon his life. Mark's eyes frequently turned toward Jennie as reference was made to the part she had taken in the desperate enterprise ; and when Grant had related the circumstances of his meeting with Lew Southard in the cabin at Minnesota, of the undoubtedly fraudulent marriage of the outlaw with Jennie, of the brave girl's fruitless attempt to prevent the robbery, and of the bullet which she had sent through the hat of her betrayer as he was leaving the bar, Mark could restrain his enthusiasm no longer, but leaped from his seat and insisted upon shaking both of Jennie's hands, although still white with flour.

" But I have not completed the story," continued Grant, as Mark returned to his seat. " Lew Southard and Orville Bement are one ! . There can be but little doubt of it. We recognized each other when I disarmed him in the cabin at Minnesota. This is the reason why I have permitted the story of my death to go uncorrected to all except Martha and the relatives with whom she is making her home.

If Bement believes me to be dead, he will return to Brinton—the only place on earth I can reasonably hope to find him—and when he does return, I will be there to meet him !”

“Great God, Grant! are you telling me the truth?” exclaimed Mark, raising his hands in amazement. “Or are you spinning some wild fancy for my amusement?”

“You will find in the end that there is no such thing as fiction about it,” was the assurance of Grant.

“Bement in California !” mused Mark. “How long has he been here ?”

“About a year, I believe,” was the answer.

Mark ran his fingers nervously through his hair for a moment ; then grasping Grant fiercely by the arm, he exclaimed :

“Then, as surely as there is a God above us, it was *his* face I saw that terrible night through the chinking of the deserted cabin on Brady's Bar! I thought at the time that I had seen it somewhere before !”

“Brady's Bar ?” inquired Grant. “Do you refer to the Brady's Bar on the South Yuba, where the Chinese fight occurred about three months ago ?”

“No,” replied Mark, “the Brady's Bar I am speaking of is on the North Fork of the American, and is about as inaccessible a place as this.”

“Well, what of Brady's Bar and the terrible night you have mentioned ?” returned Grant, eagerly.

"Some other time will answer—to-morrow, perhaps," said Mark. "The story is a strange one, and I see the men are coming up from their work."

The miners were a rough-looking, but genial and intelligent little party, and after Mark had been curtly introduced to them and they had seated themselves in front of the cabin, awaiting the call to supper and discussing the incidents of the day, they presented a group of vigorous manhood and tireless energy peculiarly characteristic of the mountains of California in the pioneer days.

Lawyers, preachers, physicians, college professors, and adventurers capable of adorning almost any walk in life, all knew how to use the pick and shovel then ; and not unfrequently around the camp and cabin fire were subjects discussed with a breadth of thought and grace of diction which sounded strangely among the deep and pathless cañons of the early years of the Golden State.

Joe was the last to arrive from the river, bringing with him the results of their day's work. Entering the cabin and handing the pan to Grant with a satisfied smile, he was about to offer his services to Jennie, as was his custom, when his eyes fell upon Mark. Grant proceeded to introduce them, but had not completed the ceremony before Joe sprang forward, and seizing Mark by the hand, exclaimed : "Why, Mark, is this you? I'm almighty glad to see you ! Where'd you come from, where are you goin' to, and how's that snortin' little flute with



which you used to charm the she Diggers down South? Tell me everything in a minute!"

"I'm glad to see that you are acquainted," said Grant.

"Acquainted?" roared Joe. "I should say so! We scooped our beans out o' the same camp-kettle on the Mokelumne in the spring of fifty. But we'll have a reg'lar old-time talk after supper," he continued, giving Mark's hand another wrench, "and while I'm fussin' round a little, you and Grant can guess how much dust there is in the clean-up."

The black sand had not been panned out very closely, but it was plain enough to both of them that the day's yield would not fall short of fifty or sixty ounces of clean dust.

"This is a royal day's work," said Mark, shifting the dust around in the pan. "How much dirt was put through?"

"The amount can only be guessed at," replied Grant, "as we are now using sluices and shoveling directly into them."

"This scarcely looks bright enough—or some of it, at least—for river dust," suggested Mark. "I observe quite a quantity of rusty-looking particles among it."

"You are correct," replied Grant. "We are in an old channel which once hugged the bend in the little bluff at the lower end of the bar, and shall be able to clean it out, I think, before the rains set in."

I shall get to work myself in a few days, and am a full hand at the business."

Mark and Joe made the supper-table lively by rallying each other over old occurrences, and it was a pleasant party that gathered around the door of the cabin, that evening, after the table had been cleared, and all the labors of the day were over.

"Now, Mark," said Joe, throwing himself down in front of the door, where the others were lounging, while Jennie and Grant occupied seats just within it, "after pickin' the bacon out of your teeth, bring out your little squealer and give us a blast. If you don't, I'll tell all about your playin' at a Digger fandango on the Mokelumne; I will, sure; if I don't I'm a horned toad! I've got you in the door, as the monte sharps say, and you know it, and there's no use of your buckin'."

"Anything rather than that dreadful development, Joe," replied Mark; "but if you refresh my memory of the occurrence too minutely, I shall probably be constrained to recollect, very much against my liking, that while I furnished a part of the music for a few minutes, you seized a dusky and by no means inodorous partner around the waist, and added a Missouri waltz to the less picturesque but more graceful performances of the grunting and steaming assemblage of which you were a conspicuous party; and I might also recollect and incidentally mention that jealousy is as much a part of the red as of the white man's nature, and that——"

Hold on, Mark!" interrupted Joe. "You're pokin' your pole into a hornets' nest!"

"As I was saying," resumed Mark, oblivious to Joe's warning, "jealousy, so far as social science has determined and my personal observation verified, is not confined to any particular nationality or race distinction; and when, with an infatuation which I could neither understand nor approve, you——"

"Now, what's the use of your goin' on in that style?" again interrupted Joe. "Don't you see that everybody's laughin' at you?"

Joe was partially correct. Every one was laughing, but it was at his annoyance, which was due entirely to the presence of Jennie.

"Let the gentleman proceed," interposed Jennie, maliciously. "You introduced the subject, Joe, and I am anxious now to hear all about it."

"But he talks like a windmill," persisted Joe, "and don't seem to care much what he says!"

"As I was about to mention," continued Mark, apparently regardless of the interruptions, "jealousy is——"

"That'll do, Mark!" exclaimed Joe. "I take the back trail!—I let go!—I pass up my powder-horn! I reckon, come to take a squint at the business with both eyes, that I haven't got you quite as jam up in the door as I thought I had. But if I had, when you got your jaws agoin' I couldn't be heard any more than if I was in a saw-mill. Now,

if you'll just toot us out a tune or two to make us think of old times, I'll cut a watermelon the next time I meet you on the divide."

"I never could resist you, Joe, when you talked to me in that seductive manner," said Mark; and taking the flute from his sachel, he entertained the little audience for an hour or more with the sweetest music that ever floated through the surrounding hills; and when he at last put aside the instrument, his listeners retired almost in silence, as if anxious to mingle with their dreams the soft melody that still lingered around their hearts like the perfume of flowers.

In a mountain solitude, deep-gorged and gloomy, as was Braxton's Bar at that time, there is something inexpressibly tender in the tones of a flute. They seem to be in accord with the weird melody of the pines and drowsy murmur of the waters, and grand and tumultuous surroundings, but intensify, by contrast, the effects of silvery voices whispering peace to the soul and flooding the memory with calmer scenes and dearer faces.

## CHAPTER XVI.

*Startling Developments.—The Brady's Bar Robbery.—  
Who Mark Really Is.—More of Bement.*



HE morning following the sudden appearance of Mark Briggs on Braxton's Bar, found Grant and his eccentric friend exchanging the stories of their eventful lives after their departure from Brinton.

Mark had little to relate aside from his own strange adventures, while Grant's history of the changes that had occurred in the little village since they left it, was new and interesting to his old-time helper at the forge.

"Have you ever heard from Lucy Brinton?" inquired Mark, during a lull in their conversation.

"Not directly," replied Grant, "but frequently through Martha, who is in correspondence with her."

"I always thought she held a very warm place in your heart," ventured Mark, looking slyly into Grant's face.

For a moment Grant made no reply. Then reaching into his pocket, and taking from the many

folds of a paper one of the little flowers, now dry and scentless, that Lucy had dropped at her feet near the old lawn gate where he had last seen her, he pointed sadly to it and said :

"She plucked this flower, and then cast it aside, because there were others in the field that pleased her better. I have kept it ever since, to remind me that it was no fault of hers that she did not like it."

Mark was now silent. Grant carefully refolded the little memento and returned it to his pocket, and then continued :

"Since a boy I have worshiped her as an angel, Mark, and am not ashamed to admit it. But I never thought of her as anything else. Our paths in life were widely apart, and I did not even dream that they could ever come together. She was a Brinton, and I the grimy son of a village blacksmith."

"And what of that?" said Mark, with an emphasis unusual with him. "What is there in the name that makes a Brinton better than a Bouton? And, besides, John Brinton may be bankrupt by this time, while you have but to reach out and help yourself to fortune?"

"You may be right," replied Grant, thoughtfully ; "but Lucy loves Orville Bement ; I am sure of it ; and I love her too well to permit her either to wed that scoundrel, or sell her hand for gold. In any event, I would not become the purchaser !"

"Nobly said !" exclaimed Mark. "But, speaking of Bement, how will you be able to prove that

he committed the robbery, even if it can be shown that he is Lew Southard?"

"There will perhaps be some difficulty in that," replied Grant, "but should he ever return to Brinton, I will take this poor girl back to confront him, and leave the rest to circumstances."

"Heart and soul I am with you, Grant!" exclaimed Mark, seizing him by the hand. "I have more interest in this matter than you dream of now!"

"I do not quite understand you, Mark," said Grant, with a puzzled expression.

"And circumstances must determine whether or not you ever will," was the mysterious reply. "But, as I have already mentioned, I am now almost satisfied that Bement's was one of the faces I saw behind the cabin on Brady's Bar, and something tells me that I will yet be able to prove it!"

"Had Jennie's bullet gone but an inch lower the proof would have been furnished on the spot," said Grant, "for I do not doubt that the hat which was found where the bottle of dust was broken fell from the head of Orville Bement."

"Nor do I," was the prompt reply; "but the trick will be to prove it, for it is not probable that the officers will ever arrest him. But let me have a look at the hat, if you have not thrown it out. I am curious to see what kind of a shot our brave little friend made."

"We are talking about you, Jennie," said Grant,

stepping to a shelf at the back part of the cabin for the hat.

"I thought so," she replied, pleasantly, "for my left ear has **been** burning for an hour or more. I presume you have been referring to me again as the beautiful brigand."

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Mark, who had caught the conclusion of her words; "and I will slay the man who dares to use the expression again in my presence!"

"The penalty is altogether too merciful," returned Jennie; "let the offender die of remorse!"

"You shall have your way, my fascinating foot-pad," replied Mark, "but I should much prefer to imbrue my hands in the blood of the miscreant!"

Grant returned with the hat, and after looking at it a moment, handed it to Mark. It had an unusually broad brim, and showed signs of rough usage.

"A pretty close shave," said Mark, examining the bullet-holes, around one of which were sticking a few tangled hairs. "The bullet must have cut the scalp, and pretty deeply too, to have knocked him down."

"That is plain enough," added Grant, placing the hat on his own head, "for if it was in its usual position, the bullet could not have passed through it without touching the scalp."

"Let me see if the maker's name is on the lining, or if there is anything behind it," requested Mark. "Valuable papers are sometimes secreted there for



safe keeping, and not long ago a New York burglar, who lost his hat in escaping pursuit, was detected through some papers placed behind the side lining to secure a closer fit for the head."

The maker's name was found nowhere about the hat, and appearances indicated that there was nothing behind the side lining; but on turning it down a carefully folded slip of dingy-looking paper was discovered. Finding nothing else, Mark carefully picked the hairs from the bullet-hole around which they were adhering, and folding them in a leaf torn from a memorandum book, placed them in his pocket, with the remark that they might prove of service some day, as the color and texture of the hair were often a satisfactory and incontestible means of identification.

Passing the hat to Grant, with the injunction not to part with it, Mark proceeded to unfold the slip of paper found behind the lining. It developed into what seemed to be a blank leaf from a small book, upon which had been traced some characters in pencil. He had unfolded it carelessly, half suspecting it to be a scrap accidentally left in the hat by the manufacturer; but as he pressed out the wrinkles and began to examine it more carefully, he slowly rose to his feet without removing his eyes from the paper.

For a moment he seemed to be riveted to the spot; then moving mechanically to a corner of the cabin as if in a dream, he opened and took from his

sachel the little Bible he had saved from the burning cabin on Brady's Bar.

Opening the book, and placing the paper against the inside of the cover, with a wild cry of "Eureka!" he sprang toward Grant, who had become scarcely less excited at his strange conduct, and placing the open volume in his hand, said :

"Was this scrap of paper ever a fly-leaf of this book?"

"A fly-leaf has certainly been torn out," remarked Grant, measuring the paper with the printed page in front, "and this is about the size of the missing leaf. But see!" he continued, moving the paper down against the stub; "the proof is positive, for the mutilated edges of the two fit into each other exactly, and make a perfect leaf!"

Mark's face lighted up with a smile of triumph as he exclaimed, "Wonderful! wonderful!"

Grant proceeded: "This is the missing leaf beyond a reasonable doubt; and to have found it in such a manner, with the book in your possession, is certainly a most wonderful circumstance, as it must have been unpremeditated. You can explain its significance. What does it mean?"

"What does it mean?" repeated Mark, solemnly. "Why, it means enough to convince me that a special providence sometimes shapes the events of men!"

"Have you ever doubted it?" inquired Grant, skeptically.

"Doubted it? Yes!" was the reply. "I have

doubted it when I have seen crime walking the highways unpunished, and virtue begging bread. But listen! This book belonged to the old man who was murdered on Brady's Bar, and this leaf, which you must admit was torn from it, I saw the villain, whom I now believe to have been Orville Bement, fold and place in his pocket, after vainly endeavoring to make an intelligent connection of the characters penciled upon it. From words tortured from the dying man, the robbers believed this leaf to contain information designating the spot where he had secreted his gold; but they failed to find it at the time, and probably have not found it yet; for the description, if a description of anything at all, does not seem to be complete."

"Most wonderful, indeed!" exclaimed Grant.. "I see it all, now! You are right, Mark. There seems to be the hand of a special providence in these marvelous developemnts. But let us see what can be made of the memorandum, or whatever it may be. I am prepared for anything now."

In a better light the paper was carefully examined. Some of the characters were scarcely legible, but with the assistance of a small magnifying glass used for the inspection of quartz, the words were finally determined, and the lines were copied by Mark, as follows:

*Initial point north-west  
thence to trachyte boulder  
Thence from base thirty*

*Thence due south-west  
six feet from ground in  
fifty yards intersects hill,  
the shovel is the key.*

"Well," said Mark, after finishing the copy, "it is little wonder that the robbers failed to find the treasure if this was their only guide. It is as mysterious as an Egyptian oracle."

"It is certainly not very intelligible," remarked Grant; "but if it is what it purports to be, there is or has been a key to it somewhere."

"That may be so," replied Mark; "but if there is such a thing as a key to the lines it is not in the book from which the leaf was torn, for I have examined every page of it in the hope of finding the name of the owner." And taking the volume from the table, he ran the leaves carelessly between his thumb and fingers.

"And you have found nothing written anywhere in it?" inquired Grant.

"Not as much as the mark of pen or pencil to tell who may have presented or owned it," was the sorrowful response.

"Unfortunate man!" mused Grant, and his eyes moistened with sympathy as he spoke. "It may have been the gift of a mother or sister, or of a wife, perhaps, who will never learn of his death, or share the wealth his toil secured to make her happy!"

"It is quite an old book," said Mark, turning to

the title-page. "It was printed in 1817; but the print is clear and the binding substantial;" and he gently pressed the cover backward and forward two or three times to test its strength. When he removed his thumb, a leaf, which seemed to be the permanent lining of the inside of the front cover, had started from its fastenings, and taking it by one of its loosened corners, he began gently to peel it downward, to ascertain exactly how much of it required repasting. In an instant the entire leaf had separated from the cover, when it was observed that beneath was the real lining, to which the leaf had been held by its pasted edges.

With a cry of surprise Mark directed the attention of Grant to a number of penciled lines on the inside of the liberated leaf; but when he turned his eyes to the white lining of the cover, the book fell from his hand, and with an exclamation of "Merciful God!" he dropped his arms and face upon the table, while his whole frame quivered with an uncontrollable agitation.

Grant rose from his seat, and after regarding Mark for a moment with speechless amazement, opened the Bible which had fallen from his hand, and on the inside of the cover found the following, written in a delicate hand:

*To her Dear Brother,  
Jesse Brinton,  
From his affectionate Sister,  
Lucy Warner.*

Grant remembered that he had heard Lucy speak of an Uncle Jesse, who had gone West many years before, and from whom the family had seldom heard; and the presumption was not unreasonable that he was the man who had been robbed and murdered on Brady's Bar; but what was there in the discovery to so terribly affect Mark Briggs?

Grant glanced again at the writing. "Lucy Warner—Lucy Warner," he repeated to himself. "There is something familiar in the name. She, too, I think, is a relative of the Brintons. But it seems to me that I have heard of the name quite recently."

Putting his hand to his forehead for a moment, his face suddenly lighted up, and hastily removing a carpet-sack from a shelf above the head of his bunk, opened and took from it a package of letters. Selecting one of them, he unfolded and glanced at its contents.

While he was thus engaged, Mark raised his head from the table. He had become calmer and was about to speak, when Grant stepped forward, and placing his hand kindly upon his shoulder, said:

"Mark, I have no desire to wring from you any secret which caprice or a better reason may have prompted you to keep; but I believe I have one here for which you would willingly exchange even the name of Marcus Caius Telemon Briggs. Here is a letter from Martha, which I received about a

month ago. If your name is Allen Warner, commence at the second page, near the top."

Mark took the letter as if in a dream, but the pages were a blur to him. He rubbed his eyes, and recognizing the familiar hand of Martha, proceeded to read as follows :

"I have just received a letter from Lucy Brinton, in which she refers to her aunt Lucy Warner, residing somewhere in the State of New York. Ascertaining that Lucy has friends in California, her aunt has written, requesting her to inquire whether any of them have ever met or heard of, either in that State or elsewhere, a young man by the name of Allen Warner, who is her son, and Lucy's cousin, of course. He left home four or five years ago, and nothing has been heard of him by the family since. The cause of his abrupt departure from home was an accusation by his father, to the effect that he had, during the absence of the family at church, removed a brick from the large kitchen chimney, and taken from its hiding-place a wallet containing a very considerable sum of money, which he had converted to his own use. He indignantly denied the charge, which his father refused to withdraw, and finally left the house, declaring that he would never enter it again, or bear a name attainted with a felony. That is the last they have seen or heard of him. Being her youngest child, the poor mother has been inconsolable at his absence, and is now more than ever distressed since the missing money has been

found. About a year ago it was accidentally discovered in the very spot from which it had been taken, and the strange explanation is, that the father, in a condition of somnambulism, to which he was somewhat addicted, removed the wallet and secreted it elsewhere, and three or four years after returned it while in a similar condition. The father's remorse has driven him to every possible device to discover the whereabouts of the son, who, it is feared, is no longer living. As Lucy corresponds with no one in California, unless it may be at intervals with Orville Bement, she appeals to me to request you to make some inquiries about the young man, as it is not impossible that he has drifted to the Pacific Coast. I know you will not refuse to comply with a request coming from such a source."

During the perusal of this portion of Martha's letter, Mark's face by turns became flushed and pallid ; but when he had concluded, and found that his innocence had been established, he grasped Grant by the hand and exclaimed with emotion :

"I am indeed Allen Warner, and am not ashamed to avow it now ! That letter tells the whole story. I will write to my poor old mother at once, who never believed me guilty, and you can inform Martha that you have seen the outcast ; but do not tell her that he ever bore the name of Mark Briggs. To avail unpleasant comment, I will retain the name by which I am now known while I remain in California, which I trust will not be long. I will write



to Martha myself, and tell her we are together, for she knows you are living ; but it must be as Mark Briggs, for as Mark we first met, as Mark we last parted, and as Mark we will meet again."

"Then you are really Lucy's cousin?" said Grant, feeling wonderfully like embracing him because of the relationship.

"Yes," replied Mark, "I am the son of Lucy's only aunt, unless poor Uncle Jesse has left a wife, which is not probable, since he never mentioned that he was married in any of his letters."

"But how could you have remained in Brinton so long without betraying yourself?" inquired Grant.

"Easily enough, considering the incentive to remain unknown," was the answer. "You do not know, Grant, how that cruel accusation stung me, and nothing but a consciousness of my own innocence prevented me from taking the world by the throat! It was during a college vacation that I left home, and as I went out among strangers, with little less than a father's curse upon me, I sometimes felt that there was no such thing as justice or mercy left in the human heart. But I thought better of the world as I mingled with it more. I taught school for a time, and finally drifted toward Brinton, where I remained for nearly a year, hoping that I might in the meantime incidentally hear through the Brintons of the establishment of my innocence. But no such word came, and one morning I left the little vil-

lage as abruptly as I had entered it a few months before. Do you remember the circumstance, Grant?"

"I shall never forget it," was the reply," for I was profoundly astonished."

"And what did Martha think?" inquired Mark.

"She was not very communicative with me on the subject," returned Grant; "but as you now have her address, I dare say if you write to her she will answer the question herself."

"I shall not forget to do so!—but poor Uncle Jesse!" Mark continued, as his eye fell upon the little Bible. "He was very eccentric, I have been told. We seldom heard from him, and I never saw him until I drew his mangled body from the burning cabin. How strange it is that I should have done it, and assisted at his humble burial! His silence will not be noted at home, and we will make no mention of his death until we shall have learned something more about it, and can place our hands upon his murderers."

"You are right," said Grant, "for if Bement is the murderer, he does not know the name of his victim, and nothing is to be gained, while a point might be lost, in giving him the information. But we have not examined the writing on the fly-leaf," he continued, taking the Bible from the table and glancing at the lines to which Mark had directed his attention.

The lines were more legible than those on the

detached leaf they had a few minutes before examined, but quite as disconnected and unintelligible. Mark copied them, as follows :

*corner of cabin. South-west  
west side mouth of creek.  
six paces due east.  
to where horizontal line  
about one hundred and  
west side. The crow, not*

"A little more mysterious than the other, if possible," said Mark, comparing the copy with the original. "As they are both enigmas, perhaps they may solve each other. Let us see how they will read together."

"First see how the first letters of the lines will read downward," suggested Grant.

"All right. They read *corner west six to about west*," replied Mark.

"Not very satisfactory, certainly," Grant admitted. "Now let us put the leaves together, as you suggested, and see what sort of a story they will tell."

Placing the detached leaf beside and in front of the other, so that their lines became continuous, Mark proceeded to read across the pages of both, as follows :

[Leaf from the hat.]

[Leaf in the Bible.]

*Initial point, north-west corner of cabin. South-west  
thence to trachyte boulder west side mouth of creek.  
Thence from base thirty six paces due east.  
Thence due south-west to where horizontal line  
six feet from ground in about one hundred and  
fifty yards intersects hill, west side. The crow, not  
the shovel is the key.*

"Why, that reads intelligibly enough!" exclaimed Grant.

"As straight as a string," said Mark; "but Uncle Jesse would have been just as likely to arrange such a description to designate the sepulchre of a dead cat as the hiding-place of a purse of gold. However, I will take the trouble some day to see what it all means."

Grant did not speak for a moment, and when he did, it was to say impressively :

"Mark, in connection with this strange chain of circumstances there seems to be something more than mere chance; and I stand humbled before the awful shadow of that directing Hand in whose hollow are cradled the waters of the seas!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

*In Search of Treasure on Brady's Bar.—Mark's Singular Meeting with Skates.—The Affidavit.*



SEPTEMBER was drawing to a close, and gusty winds and fleecy clouds, flitting across the brazen skies like skirmishers of a gathering storm, told of approaching winter.

There had been lively times on Braxton's Bar since Mark's arrival. Both he and Grant had been at work in the claim for more than a month. Two more lengths had been added to the line of sluices, and a large amount of gravel had been run through the boxes, resulting in a very considerable increase in the daily yield; but the old channel was steadily narrowing as it approached the river, and it was plain that in three or four weeks the deposit would be exhausted. But the owners were satisfied. In less than two months they had taken from the claim more than the amount of gold of which they had been robbed, and were content to abandon it at any time with a blessing upon its bounty.

Mark, with no cloud longer upon his future,

was the life of the cabin, and Joe believed there was no other such man on earth. He frolicked with Jennie, who was still known to the miners employed as Joe's half-sister; and observing that Joe was blindly infatuated with her, frequently tortured him with the suggestion that he might possibly become his brother-in-law. But Joe's uneasiness on this score was finally dissipated by the discovery, kindly made through Grant for his especial relief, that Mark's heart was in the keeping of some one beyond the mountains, and he retaliated by intimating that the alliance hinted at by Mark would be entirely agreeable to the family.

Mark had written to his mother, cheering her heart with the promise of an early visit, but cautiously failing to mention the source from which he had obtained the information of the establishment of his innocence, lest the news of Grant's recovery might by some means reach the Brintons.

He had also written to Martha, but sufficient time had not elapsed for him to expect an answer. He did not show the letter to Grant, although the time required in its composition indicated a labored effort. Exactly what it contained will probably never be known, for Martha simply mentioned a portion of its contents to her aunt without removing the letter from her bosom. But it could have brought nothing unpleasant to her, for it was noted thereafter that there was more sunshine in her face and

more joy in her smile than had been seen there since she came from Brinton.

"Who is your new correspondent in California?" inquired Mrs. Elkins, after Martha had spoken to her of Mark's first letter.

"Indeed, I scarcely know, aunt, except that his name is Mark Briggs," was the innocent reply.

"You are surely not corresponding with a man of whom you know nothing but his name?" continued the aunt, with assumed astonishment.

"I am not sure that I know even his name," returned Martha, and there was a little tremor in her voice as she spoke. "He is a young man who worked in the shop with Grant before they went to California. They did not go together, and I did not know that he was living, or that he had not forgotten me until I received a letter from him this morning." And she put her hand upon her bosom to be sure that the letter was there, and that she was not dreaming.

"The young man who worked with Grant," mused Mrs. Elkins. "I think you have mentioned him before. He was a volatile, eccentric youth, who neither knew where he came from nor cared much where he was going. Am I right?"

"No, Aunt," replied Martha, earnestly, "unless it is eccentric to be intelligent, conscientious and generous. For the many months that he was with Grant he would accept nothing for his services, and while he remained with us he made our home very

pleasant." And the tears came to her eyes, and she turned her face away that they might not be seen.

"And when he went, he took your heart with him, I suspect," said the aunt, kindly.

"I will not say that," replied Martha, frankly; "but if he did, he came by it honestly, and I would not take it back though he had neither name nor home!"

"Bravely said! But what does *he* say?" inquired the aunt, smiling at her earnestness.

Martha made no reply, but taking the letter from its hiding-place, opened it and handed it to her aunt, who glanced over the first line, and then answered her own question as she returned the letter:

"He says 'Dear Martha,' and I can imagine what follows."

"No, you can't, aunty!" and Martha put her arms around her neck.

"And why not, child? It is doubtless the old, old story."

"Perhaps it may be," was the hesitating reply, "but I am sure it has never been told so well before!"

After a consultation with Grant, Mark suddenly left the bar one morning, with the announcement that his absence would not extend much beyond a week. His explanation to Joe was, that he was about to visit their old mining camp on the Moke-lumne, where he had some dust *cached* which he deemed it prudent to remove—a statement which was substantially correct.



Traveling by stage from Forest City to Sacramento, and thence to Mokelumne Hill, he quietly dropped down the river, and two mornings after was on his way back to Sacramento, with a weight of gold dust in his sachel as heavy as he could well carry. Disposing of the dust to the old banking and express firm of Adams & Co., and receiving a certificate of deposit for the value, he took stage the next day for the point nearest Brady's Bar, on the North Fork of the American, and the afternoon of the day following found him descending to the river on horseback, over the same trail by which he had reached the bar nearly three months before.

He dismounted and stood beside the ashes of the cabin from which he had dragged the lifeless body of his uncle, and dropped a tear upon the humble grave over which he had read the simple but impressive service. The tools had been removed, but the claim where the old man had last worked remained unoccupied. Not a human being was visible, but through the chapparal the sound of pick and shovel could faintly be heard at the upper end of the bar.

Mark proceeded to the cabin where he had spread his blankets before, and found it vacant. Removing and placing within the door the saddle, to which were attached a sachel and roll of blankets, he staked his horse in a little patch of bunch-grass not far from the cabin, and then slowly returned, deliberating upon what should next be done.

Glancing down the flat, he discovered a man emerging from the mouth of Brush Creek, and approaching the ashes of the burned cabin. He was clad like a miner, and carried a light crowbar in his hand. Reaching the spot, he looked cautiously around for a moment, then seating himself upon a rock, took from the side pocket of his woolen shirt what seemed to be a slip of paper and began to examine it.

In an instant, suggested, probably by the thought of his own errand to the bar, it flashed upon Mark that he was one of his uncle's murderers, who had returned for a more careful search for the treasure, to which it was presumed the memorandum torn from the Bible referred.

As he had seen Bement, or a man believed to be him, place the memorandum in his pocket, he deemed it possible that he was the one who had returned, and promptly determined either to capture or kill him.

Loosening the revolver in its scabbard, and bracing himself for the encounter, he started resolutely down the flat. Picking his way cautiously through the chapparal, he had approached within twenty feet of the stranger before the latter discovered him, for he sat looking toward the mouth of the creek, and seemed to be absorbed in the contents of the scrap of paper in his hand.

Hearing Mark's footsteps, the man crushed the paper in his hand, and rose to his feet with a startled

look. Mark drew and cocked his revolver. The other made a motion as if to replace the paper in his pocket, but promptly threw up his hands as Mark leveled his pistol and said :

"If you attempt to draw a weapon, I will fill you with lead !"

"Drop your shooter out o' line !" exclaimed the man, nervously. "I'm not goin' to draw anything !"

Advancing a few steps, Mark discovered that the man was not Bement, but thought he recognized the face of the person who had been addressed behind the cabin as Nosey—a name which was not altogether inappropriate, for his nose was of the color of a ripe Los Angeles orange, and of unusual size.

He was not a large man, nor did he appear to be especially courageous. Mark, therefore lowered the hammer of his pistol as he said :

"There is no danger. I mistook you for Lew Southard."

"Do—do—do you know Lew Southard ?" inquired the other, cautiously.

"What brings you here ?" said Mark, abruptly, without replying to the question, for he was now satisfied that he was addressing one of the gang.

"I'm doin' a little prospectin' round here," replied Nosey, kicking up the dirt under his feet, as if he expected to find a nugget where he was standing.

"Have you found anything ?" inquired Mark, in a tone which Nosey did not quite relish. •

"Nothing to speak of," was the answer ; "but I'm told there's pretty good diggin's on the bar."

"Deep or shallow?" quizzed Mark.

"Both, I've understood," replied Nosey, uneasily.

"But you are pocket hunting just now, I imagine," continued Mark ; "trying to find something that is not quite so much scattered as it is generally found ; something that the black sand has been cleaned out of."

"I don't know what you're drivin' at," returned Nosey ; "if I do, I hope I may be stretched !"

"Yes, you do, Nosey ; you know all about it," said Mark ; "but you will not find the pocket."

At the mention of the name by which he was known to his companions, Nosey stared at Mark with a troubled expression.

"No," continued Mark, "you will not find the diggings you are looking for, Nosey, for the directions you hold crumpled in your hand are not complete !"

Nosey started as if he had been stung by a hornet.

"You have a copy of the original, which is in my pocket," resumed Mark ; "the identical leaf torn from a Bible on this spot by Lew Southard, when you robbed and murdered the old man whose body lies under that tree !"

"I didn't kill the old man," said Nosey, in a supplicating tone.

"I know it as well as you," replied Mark. "It

was Lew Southard's hand that dealt the barbarous blow. But you participated in the robbery. I know the amount of dust you found in the cabin, and the trail by which you made your escape from the bar."

"I guess you're one of the stripe yourself; my covey, and are doin' a little bluffin' to be let in on some lay," said Nosey, half suspecting that he had met Brakey or Bement, and learned the particulars of the robbery. "Now you just stash that and come to business."

Mark paid no attention to the insinuation, but proceeded: "You were also engaged in the robbery and murder on Braxton's Bar. Do not deny it. If you do, I will make you answer for it with your neck! You see I am somewhat acquainted with your career. Have I told the truth?"

Nosey was in a dilemma. He dared not deny the charges, nor was it safe for him to admit them. So he evasively answered:

"I've had some little trouble with the courts in times past, and my lawyers always advised me to plead not guilty, no matter what the charge might be; and that's just what I'm doin' now."

"Well, you needn't answer the question," said Mark, appreciating Nosey's reasons for being cautious. "Now, listen. I am the nephew of the man who was robbed and murdered on this spot, and have come for the treasure which you have failed to find. Your life is in my hands. Assist and give me the information I require, and through no act of mine."

shall you be harmed. To this I pledge you my word as a man."

"What do you want to know?" inquired Nosey, half bewildered at what he had heard.

"I want to know who Lew Southard is, what crimes he has committed within your knowledge, and where he can now be found," replied Mark; "and I must have the truth!"

"If that's ~~all~~ you want to know, you shall have the truth," said Nosey; "yes, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and that makes an oath of it."

"That is all I want to know from you," repeated Mark, "and the information shall not be used against you."

"And will you agree not to use me as a witness against any one else!" inquired Nosey.

"I promise that you shall not be used as a witness," replied Mark.

"Then I'll tell you all I know about Lew Southard," said Nosey, earnestly, "for he robbed me, and is the meanest sneak thief that ever took a trick!"

With this Nosey proceeded to give Mark the information required. He said the real name of Lew Southard was Orville Bement; that he had seen him take letters from the post-office in Sacramento so addressed; that after the robbery on Braxton's Bar he had secretly raised from its *cache* and carried off all the gold belonging to himself and confederates;

that he had been traced to San Francisco, and had probably taken passage for the Atlantic States, as all track of him was there lost. He also referred to Bement's illegal marriage with Jennie Newland in Sacramento. He married her under the name of Lew Southard, and the fraudulent ceremony was performed by a gambler who went by the name of Steve Barnes. Nosey was present as one of the invited guests and witnesses. The memorandum that had brought him to Brady's Bar he had secretly copied from the leaf torn from the Bible of Bement. Thinking it possible that the missing words in the description might be filled out after a careful examination of the ground, he had arrived on the bar the day before, and his horse was picketed out of sight up Brush creek ; but he had been unable to discover the *cache*, and was about to abandon the search when Mark made his appearance.

"And now," said Nosey, after completing his story of what he knew of Bement's crimes, "to get even with a thief who isn't fit to associate with wharf-rats, I've stuck my head into your trap, and if you want to spring it, I can't help it."

"I am satisfied that you have told the truth," responded Mark, "and do not fear that I will betray you. You have in every essential particular confirmed my suspicions, and I shall now be able to move with confidence. Now let us see about the *cache*. If we succeed in tracing it, you shall not be left without a dollar."

Mark took from his pocket a paper containing the complete directions, and requesting Nosey to follow him with his crowbar, proceeded to read from the memorandum :

*Initial point, north-west corner of cabin.*

They stepped to the spot, which was readily found, and Mark glanced again at the paper and continued :

*South-west thence to trachyte boulder west of mouth of creek.*

Taking a small compass from his pocket, Mark opened and leveled it on his hand. Glancing across its face, he observed that a tall pine on the opposite side of the creek indicated the direction. They followed it, and soon stood beside the trachyte boulder. Mark again read :

*Thence from base thirty-six paces due East.*

The compass was again consulted, and, marking the direction by an object beyond, the distance was carefully measured and another point gained. Mark proceeded to read :

*Thence due south-west to where horizontal line six feet from ground in about one hundred and fifty yards intersects hill, west side.*



"All of which means, I think," said Mark, and I have frequently thought the matter over, "that the final point, somewhere on the side of the hill west of the ravine, must be indicated by the contact of a horizontal line raised six feet above this spot, and tending due south-west. In other words, a rifle-ball discharged in that direction, six feet above the ground on which we are standing, would strike near the spot."

"That looks likely enough," said Nosey; "but we have neither rifle nor level."

"That can be easily arranged," replied Mark, "it you can find an old pan on the flat, or any other vessel of the kind that will hold water."

Nosey started off in search of the required article, while Mark proceeded to erect a pedestal of stones over the spot, about five feet in height. It was neither symmetrical nor very substantial, but it answered the purpose.

Nosey returned with an old prospecting pan. The bottom was full of holes, but they were soon plastered over with stiff clay, and the vessel was then filled to the brim with water from the creek, and placed upon the top of the rude pedestal, being so adjusted that the surface of the water in the pan was about six feet from the ground.

A level strip of wood of even thickness was then placed in the water, the upper surface floating just above the brim of the pan. Stepping upon a stone five or six inches in height beside the pedestal,

Mark gently moved the floating strip so that it pointed exactly north-east and south-west ; then glancing along its level surface for a moment, he instructed Nosey to proceed to a designated point in front of a pile of slate croppings some distance up the hill on the opposite side of the creek, and there remain without moving until he joined him.

As Nosey reached the spot, Mark again sighted across the floating strip of wood with the compass before him, and shouting "All right !" seized the crowbar and hastily climbed to the croppings, where stood Nosey as motionless as a statue. He again read from the memorandum :

*The crow, not the shovel, is the key.*

"Plain enough," said Mark, "but the rest must be guess-work, for we have now the last direction. The exact point would be about six feet south of where you are standing, and a little below the level of your breast. About here, I should say," he continued, advancing a step or two in that direction, and striking the point of the crow into a crevice filled with earth in the croppings.

The crow penetrated the earth farther than Mark had expected, and moving it to and fro, he became satisfied that the cavity was of considerable depth. The earth was speedily removed, and with a cry of joy Mark drew forth a heavy tin can wrapped in canvas. But that was not all. To the amazement of both, four other heavy cans, similarly wrapped,

were one by one removed before the bottom of the *cache* was reached.

Satisfying themselves that they had secured the entire deposit, Mark burdened Nosey with two of the packages, and with the other three in his arms they descended from the croppings.

Reaching the mouth of the creek, Nosey turned and looked up at the spot on the hillside from which the treasure had been taken, and shaking his head, remarked :

"It's no wonder I couldn't find it with the directions I had, and I'm not sure that I could a' done it with yours."

"It is certainly marvelous!" replied Mark. But he was thinking of the strange manner in which the two leaves of the Bible, each necessary to the other, had fallen into his hands, and not of the directions themselves, which were plain enough to follow.

"I feel better than as if I had found it myself," said Nosey, as they entered the abandoned cabin with the treasure.

"And so do I, Nosey!" replied Mark. "But we have just about time to reach Singleton's Station before dark, and we had better be off. Bring your horse down from the creek, and by that time I will be ready, for mine is just back of the cabin."

Before Nosey returned Mark had changed the name of "Uncle Tom" to that of "Jesse Brinton" on the head-board of the grave under the pines, and was ready for the trail.

The horse mentioned by Nosey turned out to be a patient and humble donkey, which he had probably picked up somewhere without the owner's permission; and as the bridle was of the Apache pattern, and the saddle consisted solely of a pair of blankets, Mark placed across the pommel of his own saddle the heavy sachel containing the gold of his dead uncle, and they started silently up the trail toward Singleton's Station.

Mark did not seriously apprehend any danger through the treachery of his companion; yet he was burdened with a tempting amount of treasure, and deemed it prudent to keep Nosey in advance of him in the trail.

As they approached the station Nosey began to evince considerable uneasiness, and when they entered the stage road near the hotel, he dismounted from the donkey, and rolling up and throwing his blankets over his shoulder, preceded Mark the rest of the way on foot. It was a suspicious proceeding, but Nosey's explanation was that he had too much pride to be seen riding such an animal. Mark was uncharitable enough to suspect that he abandoned the donkey in the fear that he might meet the owner.

Nosey accompanied Mark to Sacramento, where the gold dust was sold and the proceeds were deposited. Before separating Mark gave him a thousand dollars in coin, with the advice to reform and

become a respectable citizen, and in exchange received the following affidavit :

STATE OF CALIFORNIA, } ss.  
CITY AND COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO. }

William Skates, of the City and County of Sacramento, and State of California, first being duly sworn, deposes and says :

My name is William Skates ; my age is forty-four years ; I am by occupation a stone-cutter. I resided in the City of Sacramento, State of California, during the month of February, A. D. 1852. I knew one Lew Southard at that time ; I knew that his real name was Orville Bement. I knew Jennie Newland ; she was at that time a resident of the City of Sacramento, State of California. Some time in the early part of February, A. D. 1852, the exact date being now unknown to me, I was present with Stephen Barnes, Samuel Brakey, John Bridges, Isaac Rathbun and others, and with them witnessed a marriage ceremony, in said City of Sacramento, which purported to unite in wedlock the aforesaid Lew Southard and the aforesaid Jennie Newland.

And I further depose and say, that at the request of the said Lew Southard, said marriage ceremony was performed by the said Stephen Barnes, who was not authorized by law to perform such ceremony ; and further, that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the said Jennie Newland believed said marriage ceremony to be legal, and that said Lew South-

ard admitted to me at the time and knew such ceremony to be fraudulent and void.

(Signed,)

WILLIAM SKATES.

Subscribed and sworn to at my office in said City of Sacramento, State of California,  
[L. s.] this roth day of October, A. D. one thousand eight hundred and fifty-two.

A. T. KINGSBURY,

Notary Public.

"Now that I've made the davy without askin' any questions," said Nosey, as he left the office of the notary with Mark, "what are you goin' to do with it?"

"Frame it!" replied Mark, curtly.

"Do you know Jennie Newlapd?" inquired Nosey. "She was a mighty handsome girl, but Lew treated her like a dog."

"How should I know her?" was the evasive answer.

"Well, I reckon you do, for you seem to know everything," said Nosey. "But she dropped out o' sight like a shot, and we never knew where she went to. If the davy'll do the poor girl any good, and I somehow think it will, I'm glad I've made it, even if it does git me into trouble. Winkin' at that bogus marriage was the meanest thing I ever did in my life, for it was takin' a sneakin' advantage of a hard workin', virtuous girl, and I ought to git twenty-one years for it. 'Twould serve me just right!"

"I am glad to hear you say so, Nosey," replied Mark, "for it shows there is something good left in you yet."

"Thank ye!" returned Nosey. "But you haven't told me your name."

"The next time we meet will answer," said Mark.

"Then you'll tell it to a reformed and respected citizen!" responded Nosey, dramatically.

"I hope so, Nosey. Good-bye!" And thus they parted.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*Mark's Letter from Martha.—First Storms of Winter.  
—The Clean Up.*



THE first real storm of the season signaled the return of Mark to Braxton's Bar. He had been detained some days longer than had been anticipated, but his welcome back was all the heartier for it.

The storm of snow and rain continued intermittently for three days, during which time but little work could be done in the claim. This was followed by a rise in the river, compelling a complete suspension of work, and it was nearly a week before the water receded sufficiently to enable them to drain the flooded mine and resume operations. The return of their last day's work before the storm had been encouraging, and the owners were unwilling to abandon the claim with the prospect before them of two or three weeks of fair weather before the winter's storms set in permanently.

Mark informed Joe that he had safely removed his *cache*, but to Grant alone he imparted the particulars of his strange meeting with Skates on



Brady's Bar, of the discovery and disposition of the gold left by his murdered uncle, of the developments made by Skates, and of the probable departure of Bement for the Atlantic States.

"He is slowly approaching the trap," said Grant, on receiving this information, "and we will cage him yet!"

"Never doubt it," replied Mark, as he thought of the old man resting under the pines on Brady's Bar; "but lie close to the ground and keep your eye on the sights!"

Grant wrote to Martha at once, informing her of Bement's probable departure from San Francisco. Although giving the information simply as a matter of news that might possibly interest her, he requested her to continue her correspondence with Lucy Brinton, and through that source apprise him at the earliest moment of Bement's arrival at Brinton, should he visit the place.

The Sunday after Mark's return to the bar brought him a steamer letter—the first he had received since his arrival in California. It came with a package of letters and papers brought down from the divide by Joe. Grant opened the package, and after glancing over the letters, held one of them up as he announced:

"And here is a letter addressed to Mr. Marcus Briggs! Is there any gentleman of that name on the bar?"

"In the absence of any other claimant, I will

take it," said Mark, hastily stepping forward and reaching for the letter.

"Let me see!" continued Grant. "I am not sure that you are Mr. Marcus Briggs; and then I think I recognize the handwriting of some one who cannot possibly know you, for I have myself received a letter which seems to have been directed by the same person, and both bear the post-mark of Buffalo!"

"Never mind the handwriting or the post-mark!" And with a little more color than usual at the roots of his whiskers, Mark snatched the letter from Grant's hand and proceeded to—open and read it?

No! He knew the letter was from Martha, and like a great school-boy walked around with it unopened in his hand for ten minutes, wondering what was in it.

But he finally opened it. He was compelled to do so, for he could not read it very well until he did. The surroundings were not entirely satisfactory for so momentous a proceeding; but as the weather was drizzly, and he could not seek that solitude outside of the cabin which seemed to be fitting, he took a seat in the open doorway with his back to Grant, and pulling his hat down over his eyes, proceeded to open the letter as delicately as if he was setting a mouse-trap. And then he stopped, and mentally wanted to bet some one a thousand dollars and lose the money, that the letter commenced with "Dear sir."

He finally glanced at the first line under the date. It began "Dear Mark." Those two brief words seemed to be about as much as he could comfortably digest at one time; and partially refolding the letter, so that the delicious expression might not escape, or in any mysterious manner disconnect itself with the lines that followed, he coughed with an effort, moved his stool all of a quarter of an inch, as if to get away from a dangerous draft as far as possible, stroked his whiskers, re-adjusted his hat, made a kick at a pet lizard that was looking up inquisitively into his face from the door-sill, and then stared out vacantly into the rain.

After indulging in a few more conjectures, he read the first sentence; but a repetition of these, or other equally irrelevant movements, emphasized the completion of each paragraph, until he had passed an hour or more over a plainly written letter of three pages. But to Mark those three pages were a whole volume of poetry and song. Did the reader ever receive such a letter?

Grant, who had been watching Mark's movements for some time with amusement, finally threw aside the newspaper he had been reading, and inquired with a yawn:

"Finished reading your letter, Mark, for the fourteenth or fifteenth time?"

"No—yes—that is, not quite!" stammered Mark, turning partially around, and folding and placing the letter in his pocket

"Anything new?" continued Grant, carelessly.

"Yes, plenty of news!" replied Mark, catching the humor of the inquiry; "but you will have to guess what it is."

"I could make a pretty close guess, I imagine," returned Grant, with a knowing look. "But don't be alarmed. I have no desire to see the letter, and would rather swallow a quart of strained honey than read it!"

"Possibly," said Mark, maliciously; "but I think I could name a person between here and sunrise, to receive such a letter from whom you would swallow a quart of wormwood."

"I reckon I brought you some letters from your sweethearts, didn't I?" said Joe, opportunely entering the cabin with an armfull of wood. "I never get any such things, and I should judge the girls must be pretty hard up in the neck o' woods you hailed from to be crow-trackin' to such fellers as you are!"

"Don't be jealous, Joe," retorted Mark. "You will commence receiving letters of the same kind as soon as I establish a penny post between this room and the next."

"There you go again!" said Joe. "A chap can't stick you with a sliver that you don't turn round and tomahawk him!"

"See here!" exclaimed Mark, as Jennie made her appearance from her own little room; "Joe wants you to write him a letter."

"Do you, Joe?" asked Jennie, turning toward her admirer, who was shaking his fist at Mark.

"I never said anything of the kind!" roared Joe. "I'm a ring-tailed raccoon if that man can't lie the ears off a government mule!"

Mark having thus adroitly diverted attention from his own correspondence, the subject of letters was dropped, and as the rain had ceased, he strolled up the flat and gave Martha's letter three or four more readings before supper.

The weather again becoming favorable, work was resumed and continued in the claim until about the first of November, when the diminishing yield from the sluices, as well as the indications of another storm, rendered advisable the discharge of the miners employed and the final suspension of operations.

This being determined upon, the tools were brought to the cabin one morning, the miners were paid off and started down the trail rejoicing, with a generous addition to their wages, and Jennie and our three old acquaintances were left alone on the bar.

What next, and what was to become of Jennie? As Bement had left the State, she could return to her friends in Iowa without danger, and Grant had determined that she should accept the full value of the gold which her bullet had restored at the time of the robbery.

Mark and himself, it had been quietly arranged, were to proceed to San Francisco, and there remain

until the arrival of Bement in Brinton. Jennie, if the plan was agreeable to her, could accompany them to the Bay, and either remain there until they were ready to go, or be placed on board a steamer for New York, leaving her future address, so that she might be communicated with if required.

But what of Joe? They had not thought of him. In the early part of the season, before the robbery, his dream was of a few heavy sacks of gold and a lively winter in San Francisco. But his tastes had undergone a change; his aspirations had taken a quieter and more rational bent, and his thoughts led him gently at last to a neat little cottage in some quiet spot, with a forest background and a stream in front, and with vines around the door and Jennies bright eyes peeping through the leaves.

To him the thought of his approaching separation from the little party brought with it a feeling of desolation such as he had never felt before; and as they sat around the cabin fire in the evening, listening to the mellow notes of Mark's flute, Joe seemed to be the only miserable one among them. Jennie noticed it, and her heart ached a little, too, at his despondency, for she seemed to cling closer to him than usual, and they sat and gazed into the fire more than they talked.

Before they retired that night, the arrangements made were, that, as Joe did not want the property, the claim, cabin and tools should be given to his old friend and relative, Scully, the jolly Minnesota

butcher ; that Joe was to pack Jennie's effects and some other odds and ends on the jack to Forest City in the morning ; that on returning he was to provide a horse for Jennie's accommodation, and the day following they were to bid farewell to Braxton's Bar.

When Joe crawled from his bunk early the next morning, a furious storm was raging, and the ground was covered with snow. He was glad of it. He dug the brands from the ashes and started a fire, then drew on his blanket coat and went to the door.

As he opened it a gust of wind whirled a cloud of snow into his face, and before him stood the donkey, with his ungainly head as far into the cabin as the closed door would permit.

Joe knew what the matter was. The storm had driven the animal home ; and as the trails leading from the bar were filled with drifted snow, which was wildly flying in every direction, a trip to Forest City that morning was out of the question. And this was the judgment of all in the cabin when they looked out into the blinding storm.

"Do you think the weather will be better to-morrow, Joe?" inquired Jennie.

"I hope not !—that is, I think it doubtful !" replied Joe, with a feeling of gratification at the prospect of a long storm.

"We may be snowed in for a whole month !" said Jennie, in alarm. "That would be dreadful !"

"Nothin' very dreadful about it," Joe quietly

answered. "We've plenty of grub, and I reckon we can manage to keep from freezin'."

After breakfast Joe went out and covered the jack with an old blanket, and gave him a feed of potatoes and scraps from the table. He then felled one of the pines back of the cabin, for their fuel was getting scarce, and invited Grant and Mark to amuse themselves by working it up into firewood.

It was not a large tree, and **with** a relish they cut, rolled to the cabin and split, **five** or six lengths from the butt, and then concluded they had provided wood enough to last until they left the bar.

"You'd better get it all down in front of the door," said Joe, significantly, wetting his finger and holding it up to catch the course of the wind. "If you don't, you may have to dig it out o' the snow in the mornin'. And don't forget the limbs, either. They're a heap better than the body."

"All right, if you say so, Joe," replied Grant. "A little work in a snow-storm will not hurt either of us ; but I really do not see the necessity of laying in any such an amount of fuel !"

"Perhaps you don't," returned Joe ; "but you had better take my advice and do it ! There's an ugly look above us, and we won't leave the bar very soon unless we do it on snow-shoes. And while you're workin' up the balance of the tree and packin' it down in front of the cabin, I'll bring up the sluices from the claim, knock the boards apart,



and fix up a rough shelter for the jack back of the chimney."

"I don't much fancy the job," said Mark, as Joe started for the river; "but we had better do as he suggests, for he knows more about mountain weather than we do."

All went to work with a will, and before dark the wood was piled in front of the cabin, and the donkey comfortably stabled behind the chimney. During the evening the storm increased in violence, and as they sat around their warm fire of pine logs, all were happier for the work they had done that day.

The next morning the wind had lulled to a whisper, but the ground was whitened to the depth of two feet or more, and the snow was still rapidly falling, with no prospect of an early cessation.

The cañon trail was in places covered with a depth of ten feet of drifted snow, and an attempt to reach the divide was not thought of. The river trail was quite as impassable in the narrow gorges, and nowhere could it be followed.

As nothing else could be done, the day was devoted to cleaning gold dust. The dust had been sacked in large buckskin purses, of which Jennie had from time to time been made the custodian, with the head of her bed the depository.

The purses were brought forth, and when the contents were emptied into a prospecting pan, the vessel was heaping full. Jennie was laughingly

told that the gold should be hers if she would lift the pan six inches from the table. A single trial convinced her that the proposal involved no risk to the owners, and without admitting her inability to comply with the conditions of transfer, she magnanimously declared that a second robbery in a single season would be a cruelty to which she could not think of becoming a party.

The cleaning of so large an amount of dust was by no means a light task ; but, with a single magnet and two additional blowers improvised from the bottom of a tin-pan, the three men set to work, and after five or six hours of ceaseless application to the delicate business, were prepared to testify under oath that the work they had done in the storm the day before was a tireless pastime in comparison.

The black sand removed from the dust with the magnet—nearly always carrying with it light particles of gold—was deposited in another pan, together with the still lighter admixtures excluded from the blowers by the breath.

After all the dust had been thus manipulated, into the vessel containing the refuse was poured a few ounces of quicksilver, and a full pound of re-torted gold was added to the pan of marketable dust.

"Now that it is all together, Joe, we may as well divide it," said Grant. "But, first, bring me a bottle."

Joe knew the size required, and was not long in producing the article wanted. Grant filled the bot-

tle to the neck with dust, which was in turn poured into a stout buckskin purse, upon which had been lettered in ink the name of "Jennie Newland." Securely tying the mouth of the sack, he proceeded to Jennie's room, and placing the heavy purse in her lap, said :

"This is yours, Jennie. You *must* accept it. If you refuse, Joe and I have concluded to throw it into the river." He then hastily retreated and closed the door behind him before Jennie could reply.

She sat for a moment almost stupefied with the precious burden in her lap ; then rising with her eyes filled with grateful tears, she placed the gold beneath her pillow, and knelt and prayed that God would bless the givers.

"Now, Mark," said Joe, "you've been standin' in with us for two or three months, and I——"

"No, you won't !" interrupted Mark. "I have plenty of my own, and don't like the appearance of this rusty-looking stuff well enough to pack any of it around with me !"

"But——" continued Joe.

"There is no but about it," persisted Mark. "You just divide this dust between you, and I'll see that you do it honestly."

Two pans were then procured, and into each was alternately poured a leveled cup of gold. The little that remained after it had been thus fairly divided was separated into two equal parts, as nearly as the eye could determine, and then Mark turned his back,

and at the inquiry of "Whose is this?" satisfactorily fixed the ownership of the two piles. The gold was then sacked in marked purses and returned to Jennie's keeping.

Day after day the storm continued, with occasional intervals of fair weather and one or two clear, cold nights, until a week passed. The snow was between five and six feet in depth on the flat, while the pines in the ravine back of the cabin showed that in some of the depressions the drifts could not be less than forty feet in depth.

An account of stock was taken, and it was found that the jack had been an expensive boarder. He was a picture of contentment in his little stable back of the chimney, but it was not until the flour, bean and potato sacks were overhauled that the full cost at which his comfort had been purchased was ascertained. In addition to his regular meals, **handfuls** of beans and potatoes had been thoughtlessly **doled** out to him during the day by all in the cabin.

His feed-pan was always empty, and while **his** persistent and hypocritical assumptions of impending starvation had secured for him an unprecedented opulence of keeping, they had brought his humane but improvident entertainers to the verge of want.

Joe was annoyed at the unexpected discovery that their provisions were running low, but by no means alarmed. He spent the afternoon in making a pair of snow-shoes, and the next morning slipped his feet into them and started down the river. Re-

turning in the afternoon, he announced that the descent to German Bar was not difficult, and that the trail from that point to the divide was open.

As the skies were clear again, it was decided that the original arrangements for leaving the bar should be carried out the following morning, the route to be by way of German Bar, as the cañon trail was plainly impassable.

Joe was in a dilemma. He knew they could not remain on the bar without provisions, while to leave it meant his final separation from Jennie, for he had been apprised of her purpose to return to Iowa.

He knew she had been married to a scoundrel whom she would probably never see again; but, were she free to act, Joe was by no means certain that she would want him. He knew but little of women, and failed to see, what was plainly visible to others, that a separation would be quite as painful to her as to him.

Grant and Mark were quietly talking over the situation, Jennie was busy around the fire, and Joe was uneasily walking the floor. It was plain that he was digesting some momentous question, under the inspiration of which his bearing at intervals alternated between that of a prairie-rabbit and Nubian lion.

He finally stopped abruptly, and giving the fire a vigorous and altogether unnecessary overhauling, turned and asked Jennie if she could furnish him

with a coarse needle and bit of stout thread, as he had torn a button from his overcoat.

"Never mind, Joe," said Jennie; "I will sew it on after supper."

But Joe insisted upon doing it himself, and when she went to her room for the needle, he timidly followed, as if two full-grown persons were required to carry it. Entering the room behind her, he partially closed the door.

Mark observed the movement, and directing Grant's attention to it, expressed the opinion that Joe had followed Jennie to her room to "purge the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart," and that he would undoubtedly feel either better or worse when he returned.

As Jennie started to return with the required articles, she discovered Joe at her elbow, looking as if he had stolen something and did not know where to hide it.

"Here they are, Joe!" she exclaimed, a little surprised at his presence, for she had not observed that he followed her.

Joe took the extended hand instead of the articles in the fingers. Jennie did not withdraw it, but with the other stuck the needle in the lappel of his coat, and a little nervously wound the thread around it. This brought her face very close to Joe's, and his heart hammered his ribs like a pile-driver. Still holding the hand, he finally gasped :

"Jennie, I feel as miserable as if I'd found a tarantula in both pockets!"

"Why, what is the matter, Joe?" she inquired, looking up in his face.

"Well, you're about to go one way, and I another, and I can't stand it!" replied Joe, with terrible earnestness.

Jennie dropped her eyes and was silent, but did not move.

"No, I can't stand it!" continued Joe, becoming bolder. "I—I—I ain't used to it! I wasn't brought up that way! I just love the ground you walk on, and it'll tear me all to pieces to say good-bye!"

Love and gratitude beamed through her tears as she looked up and said:

"No more, Joe! You know I am already married!"

"I know it," replied Joe; "but if you was free to choose, would as rough a man as Joe Braxton have any chance?"

There was a look of genuine heroism in her face as she frankly answered:

"I am strong enough to say, and I know you are too generous to misconstrue the motive, that you would be the first choice of my heart, Joe, were I free to make it!"

Joe clasped her to his heart in a wild and rugged embrace—for in the joy that filled his soul he could not help it—and then exclaimed in a tone plainly audible in the other room:

"If that's the case, I'm the happiest man on earth, for I'll trail the scoundrel and make you a widder before you wear out another pair o' shoes!"

"There is no occasion for any such extreme measures, Joe!" said Mark, as he suddenly exhibited his smiling face through the half-open door. "Here, take this and read it," he continued, handing Joe the affidavit of Skates, and withdrawing and closing the door behind him.

"Well," said Mark, resuming his seat and pointing toward the door of Jennie's room, "we both know how that little matter will end *now*. That affidavit, I think, was all that was required to fix the business, for Joe was holding her head very close to his vest when I looked in upon them."

"Nothing could please me better," replied Grant, "for Jennie is as good as gold, and Joe is one of the best men in the world!"

However gratifying this new phase in the situation may have been, it plainly involved a change in the arrangements made for leaving Braxton's Bar. With Jennie in Iowa, there would be no difficulty in finding her whenever her presence might be required in Brinton; but as the wife of Joe Braxton, who was a growth of the wilderness and had been homeless almost since boyhood, it was difficult to say where she might be six months hence.

Under the circumstances, it was deemed prudent by Grant to keep them both in sight until Bement's return to Brinton, and to that end it was resolved



that their marriage should take place with as little delay as possible, and that they would all remain on Braxton's Bar during the winter. It was believed that neither Joe nor Jennie would object to the arrangement when their attention was directed to the discomforts and dangers of an ocean voyage in December, as well as the pleasure which a journey together to New York in the spring would be to them all.

Jennie's face was rosier than usual when she returned from her room, and her incessant bustle around the fire indicated that she was entirely too busy to talk, or even to return Mark's wicked glances.

Joe's bearing, on the contrary, was that of a man who had been accustomed to such scenes all his life. He was proud of Jennie's love, proud of himself because he had won it, and seemed to be anxious that all the world should behold his triumph.

"Well, Joe, did you find the paper all right?" inquired Mark, as they were gathered around the supper table.

"Just the thing!" replied Joe, with enthusiasm. "It was like pickin' up a straight flush after a four-card draw. But where in the name of heaven did you git hold of it, Mark?"

"I may tell you some day," was the answer; "but in the meantime you may rest satisfied that the document is genuine. I was present when it was signed and sworn to."

"But Jennie says Bill Skates is one of the chaps that robbed us," returned Joe, with a troubled expression.

"Jennie is right," replied Mark. "I fell in with the fellow accidentally during my late trip South, found that Lew Southard had escaped from the State with the proceeds of the robbery, and for the affidavit and certain other information promised that he should not be arrested. And I may as well inform you now that we expect to hear before long of Lew Southard's return to a certain little village in Ohio, and when we do, your and Jennie's presence will be required there."

"All right," said Joe. "There's a tangle to me somewhere in the business ; but I expect you and Grant know what you're about, and I'll do just what you say if I lose my scalp !"

"You now know why it is advisable for us to keep pretty well together for some time," resumed Mark.

Joe nodded his head, and smiled as he thought how completely arrangements had already been made for keeping two of the party together at least.

"Now, will you and Jennie agree to follow my instructions to the letter until the whole mystery connected with this robbery shall have been unraveled ?" inquired Mark.

"Of course we will !—won't we, Jennie ?" replied Joe, placing his hand affectionately on her arm, and

removing it as if the limb was red-hot on discovering that the movement had been observed by Mark.

"Certainly," said Jennie, "for I am sure Mark will advise nothing that he does not believe to be for the best."

"You are right, Jennie! and my first order is that you two lovely and loving beings be made man and wife at once!" announced Mark, with a slightly dramatic flourish.

As the effect was less startling than might have been expected, it was manifest that the matter had already been discussed, with a conclusion not materially at variance with Mark's order. However, Jennie dropped her eyes and remained silent, while Joe, with feigned surprise, gave vent to a shrill whistle, and then inquired :

"Well, when we're married, what then?"

"What then?" repeated Mark with assumed embarrassment. "If your mind is not clear on that point, Joe, you had better consult some one who has had personal matrimonial experience."

"You're as frisky as a saw-horse," returned Joe. "You know what I mean."

"Well," said Mark, laughing at Joe's annoyance, "my advice is that we all remain on the bar this winter. If Grant moves around too much, Lew Southard, who now believes him to be dead, will be apt to hear of his recovery, and that must not be. And, besides, we can make ourselves very comforta-

ble here if we set about it. What do you think of it, Jennie?"

"It is perfectly satisfactory to me," was the reply.

"And to me," followed Joe.

"That matter being settled, when shall we have the wedding, Jennie?" inquired Grant.

"Excuse me!" interposed Mark, promptly. "I am the one to be consulted in this matter, I believe. If agreeable to Jennie, the knot shall be tied on Christmas, and we will have a double holiday."

"Why, that's nearly a month off!" exclaimed Joe, looking reproachfully at Mark.

"You will keep till that time, I guess, if you are well salted!" was the barbarous reply. "But what do you say, Jennie?"

Jennie thought Christmas was quite early enough, but finally accepted the date after a mild protest, which Mark gently but firmly overruled.

And Christmas was the date definitely fixed for the wedding.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *A Wedding on Braxton's Bar, Accompanied by Some Embarrassment.*



HE same evening that had brought about the sudden betrothal on Braxton's Bar, it was arranged that, as soon as the weather would permit, Jennie's room should be enlarged for the accommodation of two, and an ample supply of choice provisions laid in for the winter.

But the first thing was to provide for the urgent necessities of the present, and the next day Joe succeeded in reaching Minnesota and returning with a donkey load of such articles of food as were most needed in the cabin.

Several days of fair weather followed, at the end of which time the thawing snow had become sufficiently packed for the opening of the trail to the divide through the cañon back of the cabin, and then began the work of preparing for the winter.

A wagon-load of lumber was sent to the bar through a snow-chute down the mountain side, and so successful was the conveyance that it was em-

ployed in supplying the cabin with such of its stores as could not be damaged or destroyed by the transit.

While Mark and Joe were engaged in increasing the size of Jennie's little apartment, re-chinking the cabin, renovating the roof and providing more comfortable beds for the winter, Grant was on a quiet visit to San Francisco. The reader will recollect that he had purchased a few unimproved lots among the sand-hills of that city some time before, and as grading expenses to a considerable amount had been assessed against them, he deemed it advisable to give the matter his personal attention. He borrowed Joe Braxton's name for the journey, and avoided observation as far as possible.

Before leaving for the bar, he requested Jennie to furnish him with such measures of herself as are usually required in dressmaking, his avowed object being to find a woman of precisely her size, if possible, in which event a double marriage might be expected on Christmas-day.

When Grant returned, after an absence of nearly three weeks, he found everything in a very comfortable shape for the winter. Jennie's room had been enlarged and provided with a board floor and stove, another glass window had been added to the main apartment, mattresses and pillows had been procured for the bunks, and a supply of provisions laid in embracing almost every luxury to be obtained in a mining town at that time. Among the sup-

plies were canned oysters, clams, lobsters, sardines, mushrooms, peaches, honey, pots of chow-chow, pickles, sauces, *et cetera*, together with a few cases of champagne and other wines and liquors. Nor had Mark overlooked a dozen or two volumes of books, a set of chess-men and a few packs of playing-cards, and a liberal supply of barley showed that Joe had not forgotten the donkey.

Grant was surprised at the comfortable surroundings provided during his absence, and so was Jennie when she opened a trunk which he had brought with him from San Francisco and Joe had packed down from Minnesota. It was filled with rich and serviceable clothing made and fitted to her measure, including a luxurious set of furs, gloves, boots and other articles which a lady of taste alone could have selected.

Notwithstanding her seclusion from the world, Jennie still retained the tastes and foibles of her sex : and as she examined the articles, one by one, all so appropriate and desirable, tears of happiness welled up into her eyes, and without a word of warning she threw her arms around Grant's neck and kissed him.

"That's right, Jennie!" exclaimed Joe. "Now kiss him once for me!" And she complied with Joe's request, as Grant was probably too much surprised to resist.

"Well, I don't care!" said Jennie, apologetically. "It was so generous and thoughtful in Grant that

I couldn't help it!" And the roses deepened on her cheeks as Grant replied :

"I am glad you could not help it, Jennie, and am willing to duplicate the lot at the same price."

"Cheaper than cats in Connecticut!" roared Joe; and at the ambiguous remark Jennie very properly boxed his left ear hard enough to cripple a mosquito, and then closed the trunk and sat down upon it, as if she was driving some one to despair at being thus debarred from a further inspection of its contents.

It seemed to Joe that it would never come, but Christmas morning arrived at last, and found everything arranged for the wedding. The cake was of Jennie's own baking, and a fat turkey had been with difficulty secured, through the especial efforts of Mr. Scully, to give tone to the supper, which was to be a Christmas as well as a wedding feast, and was therefore to precede the ceremony in the evening.

Grant and Mark were ready to grace the occasion in plain business suits, while Joe had been provided by a clothier of Forest City with a becoming suit of black, including gloves and a white shirt, and red neck-tie.

The only invited guests were to be Mr. and Mrs. Jonas Scully, and the Reverend John Quincy Bangs, who had been selected to perform the ceremony; and as it would be impossible for them to



return to the divide after supper, arrangements had been made for their accommodation for the night.

Mr. Scully, as has perhaps been already mentioned, was Joe's cousin. The relationship had been discovered some months before while Joe was making a purchase of beef in Scully's shop in Minnesota, and they had since been on very friendly terms.

He was a stout, good-natured, middle-aged man, with a face indicative of a plentiful consumption of his own wares, and no especial aversion to refreshments of a liquid character.

Mrs. Matilda Scully's style of moral and anatomical architecture was widely different. She was a tall, slim, sharp-eyed woman of forty, with an ambition above a butcher's block, and a severe sense of propriety, which the rollicking conduct of her husband had subjected to incessant and wearing shocks during their twenty-odd years of married life.

Reverend John Quincy Bangs—and he always wrote the name in full—was a regular ordained minister of the Gospel. He was a mild-mannered, bald-headed man who, in the absence of a regular charge, was peddling Bibles at cost price, preaching in out-of-the-way places for such consideration as the circulation of a hat among his listeners might bring him, and accepting the hospitality of the members of the church to which he belonged. A marriage to him was a windfall. It was manna in the desert of his life, for it usually implied a large

gratuity, a substantial repast, and a plentitude of inspiring beverages, in which clergymen are permitted by custom to moderately indulge without reproach on such occasions.

Ascertaining by some means that the marriage-license had been issued, through the mediation of Mrs. Scully, who was of his religious faith, and at whose house he was temporarily stopping, Mr. Bangs was engaged to perform the ceremony, with the understanding that he was to accompany the Scullys to Braxton's Bar on horseback on Christmas afternoon.

As the facilities for exchanging clothing in the cabin at short notice were none of the best, Joe followed the example of Grant and Mark, and appeared at the breakfast table in his wedding raiment, white shirt, red neck-tie and all. Whether he knew it or not, handsomer men than Joe were seldom met, and Jennie thought so, with a feeling of pride, as she saw him that morning. But he had never been so appareled before, and acted as awkwardly as a garlanded prize-ox at a country fair.

"Why, you look royally, Joe!" exclaimed Mark, turning him around on exhibition. "Don't you think so, Jennie?"

"Indeed I do!" she frankly replied.

"Well, I'm mighty glad I *look* that way," said Joe, "for I *feel* as shiftless as a hobbled mustang. But if these things don't drop off of me, I'll git kind o' easy in the harness before night."

About two o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Scully put in their appearance on horseback, but it was an hour or more before Mr. Bangs reached the cabin. As the weather was cold but pleasant, and he could not well mistake the route, his explanation for making the journey on foot was that he preferred to do so, when the truth was that his funds were too low to enable him to indulge in the luxury of a ride.

As Mr. and Mrs. Scully were both slightly acquainted with Grant, and would have recognized him readily, under a promise of secrecy Joe had a few days before given them so much of the history of the situation as could not be well avoided. They had, therefore, no questions to ask, and Jennie and Mrs. Scully became friends at once.

The air was keen and cold, and when they dismounted and entered the cabin Mrs. Scully was shivering, and the nose of her husband, which was usually pink, had turned to a ghastly purple. Mrs. Scully was alarmed at the change in the color of the organ, and not doubting that it had been frost-bitten during the ride, insisted upon applying to it a poultice of snow.

Refusing to accept the assurance of the owner of the nose that it was not frozen, Mrs. Scully sprang forward and vigorously applied her thumb-nail to its yielding surface. The test was satisfactory, as it started blood from the nose as well as a howl of pain from Mr. Scully.

So gratified was she at the discovery that no per-


manent injury had befallen that conspicuous feature of her husband's face, that she did not object when he accepted Mark's invitation to warm his throat with a glass of brandy and water.

On the arrival of Mr. Bangs he was introduced to Mr. Briggs and Mr. Grant—for the latter had by agreement dropped a portion of his name for the occasion—and was without great persuasion prevailed upon by Mark to sample the brandy; and as the better half of Mr. Scully was in Jennie's room, and he was not quite satisfied that his nose was entirely free from the desolating frosts of winter, he joined the reverend gentleman, without waiting for a second invitation, in drinking the health of the bride.

Five minutes after Mr. Scully recollected that the bridegroom had not been included in the toast, and as Mrs Scully was still absent from the room, he hastily corrected the oversight by giving Joe a distinct recognition from the bottle.

When Mrs. Scully returned to the room she discovered, with somewhat less joy than might have been expected, that the nose of her husband had assumed its customary hue.

As there were no roasting appliances in the cabin, Joe had volunteered to prepare the turkey for the table. This he did by first wrapping the stuffed carcass in dampened clean, white muslin. Another wrapping of coarser material followed, which was also dampened and securely tied. Over all was



plastered a coating of moistened clay prepared for the occasion, and the mass was then deposited under the hot embers in a corner of the capacious fireplace, and covered with brands and coals, which were kept aglow by occasional additions of fuel.

For nearly three hours it remained in its hot bed undisturbed, and when the rest of the supper had been prepared by Mrs. Scully and Jennie, Joe announced that the turkey was ready for the table. He removed it from the ashes with confidence, stripped off its coatings of clay and cloth, and a whiter, tenderer or more juicy fowl was never served at a marriage feast or Christmas supper.

Presuming from his occupation that he knew something of the anatomy of a turkey, Mr. Scully was invited by Grant to do the carving. He promptly accepted the invitation, and seizing the butcher-knife, began to clear a space before him for the operation, by shoving three or four plates from the table and nearly upsetting the stool from which Mr. Bangs was calmly scanning the luxuries which, as he had just mentioned in his blessing, a bountiful providence had mercifully vouchsafed.

Mrs. Scully gave her husband a withering look, and then turned her eyes imploringly upon Joe. He appreciated the situation, and nodding his head significantly to Grant, said :

"I wouldn't bother about movin' the turkey, Grant. You can do the carvin', for it's tender, and

we don't care how it's chopped up so we git big enough pieces."

"Very well," replied Grant ; "then I will undertake the job."

Mrs. Scully smiled her approval, and Mr. Scully uttered a rollicking "All right, my boy!" and settled back on his stool.

Mr. Bangs, whose appetite had been sharpened by a long walk and a fast since morning, remarked that he had seldom invoked a blessing over a more tempting display of food, and verified the declaration by an earnest and persistent assault upon everything within reach. Mr. Scully was quite as enthusiastic in his comments on the claret, and Mrs. Scully's eye and arm were continually but unsuccessfully interposed between him and the bottle.

The supper was pleasantly concluded, the table cleared, and the evening was wearing away, when Mark, who was acting in the capacity of groomsman, broke in upon an animated theological discussion between Scully and Bangs, by notifying the bride and groom that it would probably be as well for them to prepare for the ceremony.

The suggestion meeting with general approval, Jennie repaired to her room, accompanied by Mrs. Scully—a circumstance of which Mr. Scully immediately availed himself by proceeding to entertain his stomach with another glass of brandy and water.

In about half an hour Mrs. Scully informed Mark that the bride was in readiness for the cere-

mony, and the reappearance of Jennie a few minutes later created a genuine sensation. Her well developed form was enrobed in a rich and tastefully trimmed dress which would have been in keeping with refined and luxurious surroundings; and the white gloves, sprigs of orange blossoms in the hair, and delicate ornaments of the neck and bosom, conclusively showed that Grant must have had the assistance of feminine advice in the selection of Jennie's wardrobe.

As she approached Joe stared at her in amazement. He had never seen her before in anything more affluent than calico or alpaca, and it was difficult for him to believe that the graceful and richly-attired lady before him was the one who was about to become his wife. He had seen such faces and figures in the fashion magazines and show windows of dress-making establishments, but no such person had ever before walked up and put her hand upon him as if she knew him.

The occasion, it must be admitted, scarcely required a display of apparel quite so elaborate; but, with the materials at hand, what handsome woman could have resisted the temptation?

Joe's undisguised admiration and wonder brought a bright glow of pleasure to Jennie's cheek, and as she held out to him her gloved hand and smiled sweetly up in his face, his old-time diffidence returned, and he exhibited symptoms of a disposition to apologize for being present.

As Mr. Bangs had risen to his feet and cleared his throat for the ceremony, Joe was promptly relieved of his embarrassing situation by Mark, who conducted him to a corner of the room, preceded by Jennie and Mrs. Scully. The couple having been placed in position, Mr. Bangs was respectfully invited forward.

The step of the reverend gentleman was formal and dignified, and to give the advance something of the appearance of a festive procession, Mr. Scully seized the arm of Grant and marched stiffly behind the parson.

The libations of Mr. Bangs had rendered him severely formal and exacting in the performance of the duty before him, and although the document had already been presented for his inspection, he haloed the occasion with a new solemnity by demanding an exhibition of the marriage license.

Presuming that he had forgotten the names of the parties, Mark handed him the license. He examined the paper with an air which seemed to question its authenticity ; then turning to Joe, he said with great gravity :

"Your name is Braxton, I believe—Joseph Braxton?"

Joe nodded his head affirmatively.

"Do you write your name with an *x*?" inquired Mr. Bangs.

Mr. Scully's family pride was touched at what he considered an insinuation that Joe might



possibly be compelled to make his signature with a cross, and shaking his finger menacingly in the parson's face, he raised upon his toes and roared :

"Now, none o' that, Mr. Bangs, unless you're huntin' a little trouble with me ! I've never seen a Braxton that couldn't read and write, and I can just knock the sassage-fillin' out of any man that——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Scully," interrupted Mr. Bangs, alarmed at the warlike attitude of the butcher. "You misunderstand me. I merely wish to inquire whether Braxton is spelled with an *x*, as the *x* in the name in this license very closely resembles a *w* !"

"Never mind what it looks like," replied Scully, not quite satisfied with the explanation. "Everything is all straight, and you just move right along with your rat-killin' !"

The blood of Mr. Bangs now began to simmer, and assuming a resolute attitude, he exclaimed :

"Physically I may not be your equal, Mr. Scully; but I will *not* be intimidated in the performance of a sacred duty, nor can I submit without protest to your reference to this solemn ceremony as a rat-killing !"

Grant interposed his burly form between Scully and the parson, and a general laugh at the ridiculous controversy restored harmony. Mr. Bangs then proceeded with the ceremony.

As the last words were uttered which made the couple man and wife, Mr. Bangs stepped forward





From Punch, May 17, 1851.

with alacrity to claim from the bride the accustomed salutation. Scully detected the movement in time to roll his anatomy in front of the parson, and reach himself for the first greeting. He was anticipated by Mark, however; but the zest with which he finally pressed his lips to the cheek of the fair bride so exasperated Mrs. Scully that she threw her arms frantically around Joe's neck and almost smothered him with kisses.

Nor did she stop with the bridegroom. In her wrath she invited and received similar but somewhat less fervent salutations from Grant and Mr. Bangs, and then turned and looked at her husband with a smile of defiance. Perhaps she did not regret it, but her attempt to tinge the eyes of Scully with a line or two of green resulted in a miserable failure. Had it been otherwise, he would scarcely have bel-  
lowed, as he did :

"Boys, let's have it all over again! Take a bite or two more at the old woman; it won't hurt her any, and she seems to like it!"

"With all my heart!" replied Mrs. Scully, standing as stiff as a poker with her hands behind her, and looking daggers at Scully.

Mr. Bangs promptly availed himself of the invitation by stepping forward and imprinting a warm kiss upon Mrs. Scully's lips, her head remaining, meanwhile, as immovable as that of a statue. For some minutes she resolutely maintained the same rigid attitude, and the solitary embrace of Mr.

Bangs would have led to embarrassment but for the considerate interposition of Mark, who clasped the irate wife around the waist, and after thawing her out with a kiss, started with her on a rollicking dance around the room.

Mrs. Scully had not danced since she was a girl of fourteen, but she continued to whirl around the room in the embrace of Mark in a series of graceless hysterical hops until she felt that her husband had been sufficiently punished, and then peace was temporarily restored in the Scully family.

After the congratulations were over, and many pleasant words had been spoken, the wedding-cake was brought forth and cut, and Scully's eyes sparkled as Mark proceeded to load the table with bottles of sherry and champagne.

In the midst of these liquid luxuries Mr. Scully shone resplendently. He was at home. He knew how to handle a bottle, and had scores of drinking sentiments at his tongue's end. First, at his suggestion, the healths of the bride and groom were drank; then the healths of each separately; then the healths of Mrs. Scully and Mark, jointly and severally; then of the entire company; and finally Mr. Scully coolly drank to his own health.

Even the ladies did not decline to sip a little champagne, seduced by the incessant assurances of Mr. Scully that there was nothing intoxicating in the royal beverage. Mrs. Scully watched her husband eagerly, and vainly sought to regulate the

volume of his libations by a significant exhibition of her own glass with a spoonful of wine fretting at the bottom. But no such gauge would do for Mr. Scully ; and in order that his wife might thereafter be left in blissful ignorance concerning the amount of wine he was consuming, he found an excuse for drinking from a large tin dipper ; and as he threw his red nose into the air, and with closed eyes turned down his first draught from that capacious vessel, with a mingled look of despair and reckless retaliation Mrs. Scully deliberately filled and drained to the last drop a large goblet of the insidious nectar.

Mr. Bangs drank with marked regularity and relish, and all were soon in a genial and glowing condition. Drinking was one of the vices of the frontier which Joe had never contracted, but through the persuasion of Mark he, too, was seduced into a moderate indulgence.

Mark finally proposed a dance, and producing his flute, started upon a lively air. The only dancers in the party were Jennie and Mark ; but that was deemed to be of little consequence, and when the musician informed them that they must all take the floor, Mr. and Mrs. Braxton leading, there was no protest.

With eyes sparkling with happiness Jennie seized Joe's hand, and he went as recklessly and vigorously at work, as if he was stamping out a prairie fire. Under the inspiration of her last retal-

iatory goblet of wine Mrs. Scully nervously grasped Grant's arm to avoid an invitation from her husband, and the two were soon playing such fantastic terpsichorean freaks that it was with the utmost difficulty that Mark could proceed with the music.

After indulging in a brief individual breakdown, Mr. Scully became convinced that complete justice could not be done the occasion in that manner, and giving vent to a roar resembling that of a goaded bullock, he seized the Reverend John Quincy Bangs by the collar and elbow, as if he was about to contest the wrestling championship of the world, and began to plunge wildly with him around the room.

At first Mr. Bangs mildly protested ; but finding that he could not tear himself from the clutches of the frantic butcher, without parting with his coat-collar, in self-defense he finally drifted into a series of movements resembling a Cheyenne scalp-dance, and the other dancers were driven into the corners for protection.

Around the room and from side to side they swept, Scully snorting like a frightened mustang, and the parson leaping at intervals into the air, as if attempting to clear the head of the butcher at a single bound. It was Scully's wife who had intimated that he could not dance, and now that his blood was up, he resolved to crush under his feet, at once and forever, the damaging and malicious insinuation.

Finally, in a fourth or fifth attempt to throw one of his stogies as high as the parson's head, Scully tumbled backward over a stool, taking with him and nearly dislocating the neck of Mr. Bangs. Joe and Grant sprang to their assistance. Neither was injured beyond a few bruises, but when Scully was raised to his feet, in his left hand was still clutched about two-thirds of the collar of the parson's coat.

Scully held up the fragment and roared with laughter ; but Mr. Bangs failed to catch the comical side of the situation, and Mrs. Scully stepped forward and hissed in the ear of her husband :

"Now, you old fool, I hope you are satisfied !"

But he was not satisfied, for with another whoop he reached for Mrs. Scully, and but for the interposition of Grant, would have seized and with her continued his wild dance around the room.

For a few minutes Mr. Bangs was unquestionably a very miserable man. Two or three patches of orthodox epidermis had been scraped from the fleshless tibia of one of his legs, both elbows were bruised, the collar of his coat was missing, and he felt generally as if he had been knocked down and run over by a drove of stampeded cattle. He removed his well-worn coat for a more critical inspection of the damages, and in addition to the ruinous rent in the collar, discovered a slit of a foot or more in length down the back.

"Never mind, Mr. Bangs," said Joe, sympathetically ; "I will mend it with the price of a new one !"



As the sun, suddenly peeping through a rift in the clouds, lightens up a somber landscape, so did these cheerful words make glad the heart and joyous the visage of Mr. Bangs.

As dancing was an amusement which Mr. Scully could not indulge in temperately, it was thought best to substitute a little plain music, which Mark was called upon to furnish, of course.

This was entirely satisfactory to Mr. Scully, and scarcely had the first notes issued from the instrument before he rose to his feet, cleared his throat with a sort of bellow, pulled up his coat-sleeves, loosened his collar, and in a boisterous and indescribable utterance began to sing :

"I'm as jolly a butcher as ever was seen ;  
My meat-block is scraped and my apron is clean ;  
I've cattle in clover and pigs in the pen,  
And liver for women and kidneys for men,  
And here's luck to the cleaver and knife—  
Yes, here's luck to the cleaver and knife !

"I've a wife that is spry as a two-year old colt,  
With limbs like——"

"Mr. Scully !" interrupted Mrs. Scully, fiercely ;  
but he resolutely roared :

"With limbs like a deer, and——"

"MISTER SCULLY !" she screamed ; "don't  
you dare to sing another line of that brutal song !"

The song was Scully's own composition, and he loved to sing it ; but Mrs. Scully's final protest was too emphatic to be disregarded.

Mark was permitted to proceed, and with music and song the evening wore pleasantly away. Finally the hour for retiring arrived, and a new embarrassment suddenly presented itself to Mark, who by universal consent had been made master of ceremonies.

It is strange that it should not have occurred to him before ; but where was Mrs. Scully to sleep ? She could not reasonably be asked to crawl into one of the exposed and narrow bunks in the main room ; but what was to be done with Joe ? He had rights which could not well be disregarded, and Mark scarcely knew how to proceed, or where to begin to proceed. He finally concluded to consult Mrs. Scully, and, retiring to the back part of the room, they carried on a whispered conversation for some minutes.

"That's right !" howled Scully, winking at Grant with both eyes and turning toward his wife ; "that's right ; make any arrangements you please ; I'm not jealous ; but don't do anything to shock the company !"

"Jonas Scully, you are a brute !" was Mrs. Scully's sole but indignant response.

"Possibly, my dear," was Scully's tantalizing reply ; "but I'm not blind !"

Mark summoned Joe to the quiet little council,

and Scully assumed to experience infinite relief at the joining of a third party in the conversation.

After the situation had been explained, Mrs. Scully said she was perfectly willing to occupy one of the bunks in the main room, provided a blanket could be hung in front of it ; but Joe's gallantry, however fiercely it may have wavered with his preferences, could not permit him to consent to any such sacrifice of comfort by Mrs. Scully.

At length Jennie was consulted. What could she say ! Nothing except that any arrangement would be entirely satisfactory to her.

" Well, then, Mrs. Scully, you sleep in Jennie's room," said Joe, loud enough for all to hear, " and that settles the matter."

" That's right ; three in a bed ; comfortable arrangement !" grunted Scully, maliciously.

Mrs. Scully's eyes flashed, and she raised her finger as if to blast her husband with an uncommon denunciation, when Joe good-naturedly pushed the ladies toward Jennie's room. Before entering they turned and bade the company " good-night," and Mrs. Scully with especial politeness courtesied low and almost hissed : " I wish you a very good night, Mr. Scully !"

Scully roared with laughter at the suppressed indignation of his wife ; but she had scarcely closed the door before he proceeded to help himself to a liberal draught of brandy and water.

In a moment a soft voice called Joe to Jennie's room.

"I knew it," said Scully. "You're a lucky dog, Joe! Good-night!"

Joe proceeded to the door and timidly knocked. It was gently opened, and a white hand clasped his, and he was drawn into the room and the door closed. Jennie then threw her arms around his neck, and oblivious to the presence of Mrs. Scully, pressed upon his lips the first warm kiss of her new wifehood.

"You are my husband, now, Joe," she said, with tears of happiness in her eyes; "and before you sleep I want to tell you how sincerely I love the brave, generous, unselfish man who has made me his wife!"

Joe tried to speak, but he could not, for his heart seemed to be in his throat; but strongly and tenderly he folded her in his arms, and rapturously kissed the lips that thrilled such music to his soul, and the eyes that told their love for him in tears.

When Joe returned Scully was taking his second "night-cap" with Mr. Bangs.

"Was it a little too crowded for you?" inquired the butcher, wiping his lips on his coat-sleeve.

"Crowded, you old barbarian!" exclaimed Joe. "I didn't put myself in a fix where I was likely to be crowded!"

"No?" returned Scully, with feigned astonishment. "Well, I'll just take a look in there myself and see how the pork is packed." And he rolled to

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the room like a barrel of loose pick-handles, and knocked. The door was opened by Mrs. Scully.

"What do you want?" she snapped, observing the rosy visage of her husband.

"I want to kiss you good-night, my dear," replied Scully, pushing at the door. "I can't sleep without it!"

"Then lie awake, you drunken old brute!" exclaimed Mrs. Scully, slamming and holding the door in his face.

Scully returned, chuckling at the wrath of his wife, and turning out a stiff horn of brandy, said:

"Boys, I'm glad you've seen how Mrs. Scully treats her husband. It's just such domestic troubles as that that drive a man to drink!" And with a wink and "Here's luck!" he threw his eyes toward the roof, and the brandy disappeared.

At the suggestion of Mark, whose duties had been arduous as well as delicate, a fresh bottle of wine was opened for a parting glass for the night. Although the lips of the butcher were still moist with brandy, he accepted a draught from the bottle, and then insisted upon baptizing Mr. Bangs with what remained.

Although in a genial mood, Mr. Bangs very reasonably objected to any such proceeding, and a furious religious discussion followed. Mr. Bangs did not doubt the efficacy of baptism when properly administered, and Scully could not understand why he should object to having his bald head deluged with champagne.

From the subject of baptism they drifted to that of predestination, and when Grant and Mark retired Mr. Bangs had risen to his feet and was discussing the question in an exhaustive manner, while Scully, too far gone to reply intelligently, was nodding on a stool with both eyes nearly closed, and punctuating the parson's discourse with "'Tain't so!" "I know better!" "You're all wrong!" and other contentious exclamations.

Discovering, at length, that Scully had fallen asleep, Mr. Bangs brought the one-sided discussion to an abrupt close, and helping himself to a glass of brandy, quietly crawled into his bunk, leaving the butcher to finish his nap by the fire.

But Scully soon followed. In less than five minutes he tumbled from his stool, and in attempting to rise to his feet upset the table. He did not wait for another drink, but, taking his bearings and steadying himself for a moment, made three or four quick steps and a dive into the nearest bunk.

A grunt and snort went up from Mr. Bangs as the helpless anatomy of the burly butcher was precipitated upon him. Observing that he had made a mistake, and for the moment imagining that he had fallen upon and nearly killed Mrs. Scully, he rolled to the floor, and with the remark of, "My dear, I guess there's hardly room for two," felt his way along to another bunk, and tumbled into it without removing either coat or boots.

It was nearly nine o'clock and the breakfast was



ready the next morning before Scully could be coaxed or driven from his bunk. Noting the condition in which he had retired, Mrs. Scully heartlessly applied snow to the back of his neck with no other result than a growl, and it was not until she threatened to scald him that he was moved to crawl to the floor.

He admitted that his head felt like a bumble-bee's nest, but a wash in cold water, followed by an "eye-opener," braced him up, and after a hearty breakfast he declared himself to be in readiness for another wedding, and wanted Mr. Bangs to marry him and his wife over again.

While the horses were being saddled, Jennie hastily stitched the collar to the parson's coat and sewed up the rent in the back ; and when Mr. and Mrs. Scully had taken their departure, and Mr. Bangs had buttoned his coat preparatory to following them on foot, Joe slipped into his hand a little purse of gold which was heavy enough to make his journey pleasant all the way back to Minnesota.

And now we will leave our little party in their winter quarters on Braxton's Bar. Joe and Jennie were married, the cabin was well stored with choice provisions, fuel was abundant, and not one of them cared whether or not the trails were closed to the divide, or the drifting snows reached the eaves of their secluded mountain home.

## CHAPTER XX.

*Bement's Return to Brinton.—Unpleasant Development.—  
Lucy Brinton.*



ILL SKATES' statement to Mark, after their strange meeting on Brady's Bar, concerning the robbery of his confederates by Bement, was substantially correct. Returning to the cabin at Minnesota, after the Braxton's Bar robbery, and discovering the absence of Jennie, Bement was satisfied that they either had been or would be betrayed. He missed the clothes from his sachel, and suspected they had been removed in order that he might be the more easily identified. He did not suspect that Jennie had fired the shot that plowed the furrow across his scalp, and started him hurriedly down the river, leaving behind him his hat and the broken bottle of gold dust. He presumed the attack was due to the unexpected return of Joe Braxton, and deemed it possible that Jennie had given such information in the village as might lead to an attempt to arrest them on their return to Minnesota.

Under the circumstances, after Bement had



found an old cast-off hat in the cabin, they left it at once, and just before daylight *cached* their bottles of dust near the mouth of a little ravine leading down to Kanaka Creek. They then separated, the better to elude pursuit, with the understanding that a week hence they were to meet as strangers at a little drinking den near the Seventh street horse market, in Sacramento. The place was kept by a man who had served a term in the State prison with Brakey, and could therefore be relied upon in a case of emergency. Arriving in Sacramento, their movements were to be governed by circumstances, but in no event were they to return, except together, to the *cache* on Kanaka Creek. To this they bound themselves by an oath as solemn as they were able to devise.

By circuitous routes Skates and Brakey proceeded toward Sacramento, while Bement struck boldly across to Downieville by the way of Goodyear's Bar, rightly surmising that he could not be in a safer place than under the very nose of the sheriff. He found occasion to talk to that officer of the robbery and murder, and representing that he was a miner on Goodyear's Bar and well acquainted with the Middle Yuba and its tributaries, succeeded in securing under an assumed name an appointment as special deputy, to assist in the pursuit and capture of the assassins.

This was a bold move, but Bement was a cool and desperate villain for one of so little experience,

and it served his purpose admirably. Armed with this authority, he proceeded on horseback to Kanaka Creek, where he unearthed the treasure, and started with it at once for Marysville. From that point he took passage to Sacramento by water, where he remained just long enough to transfer his treasure from the Marysville to the San Francisco steamer.

His calculations had been accurately made, and he arrived in San Francisco the day before the semi-monthly sailing of the New York steamer. He disposed of his gold dust, purchased drafts on New York, and was stepping from the office of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company with a passage-ticket in his pocket, when a hand was laid upon his arm, and he was accosted by the name of Lew Southard. He turned and found himself confronted by a police detective.

For a moment he was startled ; but his self-possession returned, and he coolly inquired :

"Were you addressing me, sir ?"

"I was !" was the brief reply of the officer.

"Then you have made a mistake," returned Bement, politely ; "my name is not Southard."

"Perhaps not," said the detective, confidently ; "but you answer the description of that individual, and I must take you in charge."

"This is exceedingly unfortunate," replied Bement, looking the officer in the eye. "I have purchased a ticket for the steamer of to-morrow, and would not be delayed for five thousand dollars !"

"And, considering the annoyance it seems to be to you, I would not have you delayed for five thousand dollars," said the officer, significantly.

"Are you talking business?" inquired Bement, cautiously.

"Dead business!" replied the detective, taking Bement sociably by the arm and walking a few steps from the door.

"Well, then, since you are sensible enough to talk in that manner," resumed Bement, "if you will go with me to my room, I think I can convince you that you have made a mistake, and that the wisest thing you can do is to see that I do not miss the steamer of to-morrow!"

"Very well; I am always accommodating," said the officer; and the two walked leisurely away together.

What passed between them may be readily surmised; for the next day, when Bement passed up the gang-plank of the steamer, with his whiskers removed and his hair cut short, he exchanged a significant glance with the incorruptible and tender-hearted detective who had sympathetically declared that he would not have him detained for five thousand dollars. And he was not detained, for that reproachless conservator of the peace and dignity of the commonwealth magnanimously stepped between him and suspicion, and made smooth the way of his departure for safer if not to sunnier lands.

In due time Skates and Brakey arrived in Sac-



ramento. They met daily at the appointed place, but did not seem to recognize each other. A week passed from the time of their separation on Kanaka creek, but Bement had failed to put in an appearance. They were both uneasy. On the eighth day they met, as usual, at the horse market, and an hour later were together among the willows of the American Slough.

Attributing Bement's absence to treachery, they separated with an agreement to meet at the *cache* three days hence at midnight, one to take the Marysville and the other the Nevada route to Minnesota.

Skates was the first to arrive at the *cache* at the appointed time, and ten minutes later he was joined by Brakey. Together they proceeded to the spot where the gold had been deposited. The earth and rocks had been disturbed, and a moment's examination satisfied them that the *cache* had been robbed.

"May the devil fly away with me if Lew hasn't sacked the swag!" said Skates.

"Yes, we've been beautifully scooped!" replied Brakey; and they both sat down and looked sorrowfully into the hole from which the gold had been removed.

"I could almost cry," said Skates, after a long pause.

"There was enough to make gentlemen of both of us!" groaned Brakey.

"Yes, perfect gentlemen!" returned Skates.

"Lew Southard's a thief!" said Brakey, emphatically.

"Worse than that," rejoined the other; "he's a defaulter!"

And then Brakey rose to his feet that he might do the subject justice, and filled the air with stifled but uncommon blasphemy.

"That won't do any good, Brakey," said Skates, slowly shaking his head. "Let me hit him a lick! Let us pray!"

"*You* pray!" exclaimed Brakey, disdainfully. "What would you pray for?"

"That God would send down a double-breasted archangel to slung-shot Lew Southard!" was the solemn response.

"My prayin' days are over," said Brakey; "but if ever I meet Lew Southard, I'll feed his liver to the dogs! But this isn't the safest place in the world for us, and we'd better git out of it. I want to pass the Round Tent before daylight, and you had better git across the river before the pack trains begin to move. I think I'll take a run over to Ore-ville. If anything turns up, you know where a line will find me."

"You'll probably never hear from me again," gloomily replied Skates. "There's no more honesty left in the world, and I've a notion to jine the church, start a faro bank, or go into some other respectable business. When reg'lar sportin' men like you and

me can't find an honest partner, it's time to quit the business."

"You're right, Bill," returned Brakey; "rough gamblin' don't seem to pay any more; and don't be astonished if you hear before long that the Reverend Samuel Brakey is hoein' up a little patch somewhere in the gospel garden. Hell's broke loose, and I don't know where I'll land now!"

The two piously-disposed cut-throats then shook hands and parted, one of them proceeding up the creek, and the other down the trail toward the river.

Brakey never cultivated that little patch in the gospel garden. He stole a horse at the Round Tent, and as the animal was valuable, and Brakey had but two hours the start of the owner, he was overtaken and captured before he reached Marysville. The Yuba county grand jury happened to be in session at the time, and he was indicted, tried, convicted and sentenced within a week; and while Skates was in Sacramento with Mark Briggs, some time after, he learned that his old companion in crime had been killed in attempting to escape from the State prison. As he mentioned the circumstance to Mark, and referred to the part Brakey had taken in the Brady's Bar robbery, he said, with emotion:

"Brakey was a square man, and as honest as the sunshine. He never squealed on a pal or gouged his partners!"

"After all," thought Mark, "vice and virtue are merely comparative terms. Here is a man who has

been reared in a vicious little world of his own, which has been at war with all the rest; and so thoroughly at last has the thing we call crime schooled him in the belief that his conflicts with the laws of God and man are legitimate, if not entirely just, that he has come to attach disgrace and reproach alone to the law-breaker's betrayal of his own confederates. 'Brakey was as honest as the sunshine,' declares Skates. Perhaps he was—more honest, it may be, than thousands who have gone beyond with 'Honesty' written on their tombstones."

Arriving in New York, Bement remained there quietly until the middle of December, eagerly scanning the Pacific coast journals on the arrival of every mail from San Francisco, to learn what new developments had been made in the Braxton's Bar robbery. But he gathered nothing beyond the announcement that no arrests had been made, and that Grant Bouton had died of his wounds the morning after the robbery.

His confederates could not connect him with the crime without criminating themselves, and the only person he really feared was Jennie. Wherever she might be, he was satisfied that she now knew his real name, and did not know the extent to which a wronged and embittered woman might go in bringing her betrayer to justice. But as time went on, and the story of the robbery seemed to have passed from the public mind, or given place to fresher

deeds of violence, Bement felt more and more secure, and finally concluded to return to Brinton.

Intimating that he had but a few days before arrived in New York, he wrote to his mother, announcing that he would eat his next Christmas dinner at home, and two days after started for Brinton.

He arrived the day before Christmas, and was warmly welcomed back by the good people of the village. He was superbly clad, and rather extravagantly adorned with jewelry, and as the Bements had not failed to mention that he had come full-handed from the land of gold, his return was celebrated with a round of festivities extending through the holiday week.

Bement's first visit, after his arrival home, was at the Brinton mansion. He had been apprised of what was generally known in the village, that unfortunate grain speculations the year before had drawn John Brinton almost to the verge of ruin, and it was with something of a consequential air that Orville received the welcome of the Brintons under their own roof.

He was accompanied by his mother, and with a pardonable feeling of pride she noted the warmth with which Mr. Brinton grasped the hand of her son, and the flushed and timid demeanor of Lucy as she accepted the salutation of one who had been long regarded as the choice of her heart as well as the rightful claimant of her hand.



During the absence of young Bement Lucy had developed into an accomplished and unusually attractive woman. In fact, she was somewhat noted for her beauty, and with those who knew her the judgment was almost universal that for twenty miles around there was not a handsomer girl than John Brinton's daughter.

Hearing nothing but words of affection, her life had been a long wild-wood song crowded with delicious melodies. One chord alone had vibrated a strange music which she could not understand. Its tones were soft and sweet as the gurgling of cool waters, and with them had come the shadow of a brave, handsome, broad-shouldered boy, who had yearly gathered for her the rich fruits of the forest, and as he vanished toward the sunset had filled her girlish heart with the wild and hopeless story of his love.

But the shadow had changed since the leaves began to fall, and as the winds sighed through the leafless branches of the maples, a white face stained with blood rose before her, and she wondered why the vision should wring from her heart such bitter tears. And her cheek grew paler as the winter came.

She had never spoken of Grant's death since she had been first stunned with its announcement ; but the grandmother had noted the tears in her eyes as she looked out into the autumn twilight, and had one evening put her arms around her and whispered:

"He was worthy of any woman's love ; but you must forget him, child—you must forget him !"

The words were a new revelation to Lucy. She had found an explanation of her tears at last, and there was a smile on her sad face as she looked up and said :

"Yes, that is the word, Granny—I loved him ! I did not know it before, but I know and feel it now !"

"I suspected it long ago, Lucy," was the soothing reply ; "but it is all over now, and you must not let it wear upon you."

After that Lucy felt stronger, and in a measure reconciled to the shadows that came with the music, and the autumn winds that sang mournfully among the dying leaves.

The visit of Orville and his mother to the Brinton mansion reached far into the evening ; but Orville drew upon his imagination for a number of exciting events which he adroitly connected with his own career in California, and the time passed pleasantly away. At eleven o'clock Dr. Bement called, and a mug of tom-and-jerry soon reconciled him to an hour or more of social recreation.

Orville sipped his liquor with a relish almost too keen to be commended, and at length began to touch upon subjects which in a more discreet condition he would certainly have avoided.

He described the several gambling games in vogue in California at that time with suspicious

minuteness, and gave the details of numerous robberies and other acts of lawlessness with the accuracy of a professional reporter.

In reply to a question by Mr. Brinton, he said he had never met Mark Briggs in California, and had learned of Grant Bouton only through others. When questioned concerning the robbery and murder of the latter, he intimated that Grant's associations had been none of the best in California and declared it to be the opinion of many that he had not been robbed, but was killed by his mining partner in a drunken broil.

As Grant's name was mentioned, Lucy's face became as white as marble, but it flushed to a crimson with indignation as Orville spoke of Grant's associations and the manner of his death.

"I can hardly believe such reports to be true," said the grandmother, peering over her spectacles sharply at young Bement. "Grant did not seem to be a boy who would be apt to be led into wrongdoing."

"I am not speaking of my own knowledge," explained Orville, "but am simply expressing the opinions of others."

"And do you believe them?" inquired Lucy, looking steadily into Orville's face.

"I have no reason to disbelieve them," he replied, evasively.

"Well, I have!" returned Lucy, warmly, as the vision of the blood-stained face rose before her, and

her heart sprang to its defense. "Letters to his sister Martha indicated that he had a very considerable amount of money at the time of the robbery, and that his partner was a brave and generous man who was warmly devoted to him!"

Discovering that the traduction of Grant's character was not a popular theme in the Brinton family, Orville changed the subject, secretly congratulating himself, in noting Lucy's defense of Grant, on the last shot which he had aimed at his heart in the cabin on Braxton's Bar; for he loved her as well as he was capable of loving any one, and to possess her he had steeped his heart in crime.

While from childhood their companionship had been agreeable and almost affectionate, in looking into her heart Lucy was satisfied that she did not really love Orville; but he was a fine specimen of well-developed physical manhood, with pleasant ways and cultivated tastes; and since he had returned with avowedly large means, and their marriage would be agreeable to the relatives of both, she had concluded to no longer oppose a union which seemed to be alike appropriate and inevitable, and therefore awaited with indifference the renewal of a proposal which she felt would not long be delayed.

Young Bement reveled like a drunken man in the pleasures and excitements of the holidays, and for a week forgot, except when alone and the curtains of night were drawn around him, that his hand was red with blood and his heart black with

crime ; but restlessness came with the new year, and the shadows that stalked continually before him, that glared at him through the darkness, that went with him to his slumbers, that made nightmares of his dreams and filled the very sunlight with horrors, crowded nearer and nearer, until he listened to responses to his own thoughts, and started as imagination hissed in his ear the name of Lew Southard.

He could no longer remain idle. It was necessary for him to find employment for his thoughts, or seek to outrun the phantoms that hovered around him in Brinton. Lucy always received him kindly ; but there was a change either with her or himself—he scarcely knew which—and he sometimes fancied that she could read the thoughts that darkened his face, and that the hand which she did not withhold from him felt like that of a corpse in his grasp.

One evening, while Orville was spending an hour or two with the Brinton family, a circumstance occurred which almost froze the blood in his veins and deepened the shadows that beset his path. Mr. Brinton had that day received a letter from his sister Lucy, in which reference was made to their brother Jesse, who had pushed westward from the Miami Valley years before, and from whom they had since heard only at long intervals. Orville was chatting pleasantly with Lucy and her mother, when Mr. Brinton abruptly inquired :

“ Orville, were you ever on Brady’s Bar, in California ? ”

The question struck him like an electric shock. A shiver ran through his frame, and for a moment he did not dare to turn his head, not knowing what had inspired the startling inquiry. With an effort, however, he stilled the tumult of his heart, and turning, replied, with a forced smile :

"Brady's Bar, Mr. Brinton ? It seems to me that I have heard of the place, but I cannot say that I have ever been there. But why do you inquire ?"

"Lucy," said Mr. Brinton, turning to his daughter, "can you find the printed slip in relation to the death of your Uncle Jesse, which I cut from the *Dayton Journal* a few weeks ago ?"

Lucy left the room, and in a few minutes returned with the slip referred to.

"Now read it, Lucy," said Mr. Brinton ; "your eyes are better than mine."

It was an extract from the letter of a traveling correspondent of the *Sacramento Union*, which had been reprinted in some of the Atlantic journals. Among the incidents related by the writer was the following, which Lucy proceeded to read :

#### "A MYSTERY.

"On my way to Nevada I crossed the North Fork of the American at Brady's Bar. Two summers ago more than a hundred rockers and toms were in motion there, but the bar is nearly deserted now.

"I reached the place on Saturday, down as rough a trail as I have encountered lately, and lunched

with a small party of hospitable miners, who are making fair wages at the upper end of the flat, and afterwards visited a grave with which is connected something of a mystery.

"One night, some time last summer, an eccentric old man, who was residing and mining alone at the lower end of the bar, was robbed and murdered in his cabin. The cabin was then fired, but a young man who was by chance occupying for the night a vacant cabin in the neighborhood, reached the burning building in time to drag the lifeless body of the old man from the door and save it from the flames.

"It is presumed that the murderers secured a considerable amount of dust, but the bulk of their victim's wealth lies *cached* somewhere in the neighborhood, and will probably never be recovered. Such, at least, is the opinion of the miners now remaining there.

"The body of the old man was decently buried the next morning, and on the head-board of the grave was penciled 'Uncle Tom,' with a brief record of the manner of his death. Although he had been personally known to every man on the bar, not one of them knew him by any other name than that of Uncle Tom. A small Bible was snatched from the burning cabin, but it contained nothing through which the owner could be identified.

"But it was not destined that the name of the murdered man should remain unknown. About a week before my visit to the bar a man on horseback

was seen to descend the southern trail to the river, and late in the afternoon two mounted men left the flat by the same route.

"Although the object of their visit was unknown, their appearance excited but little comment at the time; but in passing the grave the next day one of the miners on the flat discovered that 'Uncle Tom' had been erased from the head-board, and above it was plainly penciled 'Jesse Brinton.' That was the only change. But who could have made it? and did the men who so mysteriously visited the bar come for and secure the treasure which the robbers failed to find? These questions are still themes for speculation on Brady's Bar."

During the reading of the extract Orville sat motionless in his chair. By turns his face changed from white to scarlet, and beads of perspiration started from his forehead. Every moment he expected to hear his own name pronounced in connection with the murder; and although a daze of horror fretted his eyes as the name of Jesse Brinton mysteriously appeared at the head of his victim's grave, he experienced a feeling of relief as Lucy concluded the reading of the strange story

"You now understand why I asked if you had ever been on Brady's Bar," said Mr. Brinton.

Orville nodded his head, but was silent.

"Poor Jesse!" said the grandmother, wiping her



eyes. "He was a kind-hearted boy ; and to think that he should have been so cruelly murdered !"

"And do you really think the murdered man was your brother, Mr. Brinton?" inquired Orville, with an effort.

"It is probable," was the reply, "for we heard that he was in California, and the name is by no means common. But who could have placed the name on the head-board? and why should it have been done so secretly? It was not the work of his assassins, or of any one on the bar, and a mere acquaintance would have made some inquiry of the miners before changing the name. But the murder was committed almost six months ago, and we shall probably never learn any more about it."

"Probably not," said Orville, "for such crimes are quite common in California, and are soon forgotten."

"I think differently," added the grandmother. "Heaven will not permit the perpetrators of such a crime to go unpunished !"

"I hope so," replied Mr. Brinton ; "but from all accounts California is a rough and lawless country, and it will be an accident if the murderers are ever discovered."

As Orville left the Brinton mansion that night strange shadows crossed his path, and new fears took possession of him. It seemed to him that the dead had found a means of communicating with the living, and that the graves of murdered men were

giving up their secrets. But he nerved himself with the thought that his crimes were known alone to himself and those who would never dare to betray him, and with the recollection of Lucy's sweet face he exorcised away the phantoms that filled the very air he breathed with the odors of death.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *Bement's Visit to New York.—Trouble with Skates.— His Engagement with Lucy Brinton.*



T was a terrible development that was made to Orville Bement in the Brinton mansion ; terrible for him to hear from Lucy's lips that he was the murderer of her uncle, however far she may have been from entertaining a suspicion so monstrous. But his troubles were by no means at an end.

The next day a new skeleton appeared in his closet—one which even the face of Lucy could not shut from his sight, for it was a ghastly reality. It was a brief announcement in the personal column of the *New York Herald*, which had met his eye almost by accident. Before reading it, however, let us relate how it came to be printed.

When Bill Skates left Mark Briggs in Sacramento, after returning from Brady's Bar and making the affidavit in relation to Lew Southard's fraudulent marriage, he attired himself in the garb of gentility and proceeded to San Francisco, where, for a season, he reveled in the fat things of the metropolis.

He sought better associates than had been the choice of his later years, and about half resolved to seek a livelihood thereafter in some honest pursuit ; and so elated was he at the virtuous resolution, which seemed to raise him at once to a dizzy plane of respectability, that he concluded to celebrate the event with a genteel debauch.

He started with champagne at the old Union, and a well-filled purse, and at the end of a month was squandering his last handful of silver in the purchase of cheap whisky among the sailor boarding-houses along the city front.

When his pockets were empty, he sat down and cursed the perfidious confederate who had raised the *cache* on Kanaka creek, and thereby rendered impracticable his immediate entry into first-class society. Still adhering to the resolution to thenceforth earn an honest living, he felt that he was almost a Christian in declining to steal the steamers at the wharves and the warehouses on Front street ; and when he adroitly raked the till of his boarding-house, at last, to meet a pressing necessity, he regarded the trifling circumstance as no especial deviation from the path of rectitude in which he had resolutely planted his feet. But the exploit resulted in no substantial benefit to his exchequer, and the next morning he shipped as fireman on a departing steamer for Panama, his object being to reach New York, where he had reason to believe he could find some trace of Lew Southard.

Since he had concluded to never again help himself uninvited to the effects of others, Skates was astonished at the kindly manner in which fortune smiled upon the wholesome resolution. He met with nothing but encouragement, and a circumstance, which he neither mentioned nor attempted to explain, one night transferred a small purse of gold from the bunk of a steerage passenger to his own pocket, thus enabling him to cross the Isthmus, and purchase a second-cabin ticket to New York after a change of raiment at Aspinwall. "Who will say that honesty is not the best policy, after all?" thought Skates, as during the remainder of the voyage his eye occasionally fell upon the man whose means had so largely contributed to his comfort and respectability.

Skates was not a stranger in New York. It was in that city that he had taken his first lessons in crime, and although some time had elapsed since he left it for the Pacific Coast, he had no difficulty in finding his old haunts, and such of his friends as remained unchanged and out of prison.

He was still in funds, and after spending a week or two with his old acquaintances, to whom he represented that he had become a gentleman of wealth and leisure, he began to think of the business which had brought him to New York.

By an examination of the hotel registers, he ascertained that Bement had arrived in that city from San Francisco some two or three months be-

fore, but beyond that he could learn nothing. He recollected that Bement's native State was Ohio, but the knowledge was of little service to him, and as a last resort he caused to be inserted in the advertising columns of the *New York Herald* the announcement which Bement had by chance observed in Brinton. It read as follows :

"PERSONAL.—The man who raised the *cache* on Kanaka creek, California, early last Fall, had better communicate at once with the undersigned through the New York post-office. If he fails to do so within thirty days, unpleasant developments will be made. His name and present residence are known to .  
NOSEY."

"Damnation !" muttered Orville, after reading the advertisement. "Is there to be no end to this bloody business?"

He at first concluded to pay no attention to the announcement ; but further reflection convinced him that Skates was not a man to be trifled with, and that in a spirit of revenge he might turn State's evidence and consign him to the scaffold.

Under the circumstances, he deemed it prudent to start for New York at once, for the purpose of by some means closing the mouth of Skates, and dissipating a danger more imminent and blasting than any that his fears had yet raised to plague him.

He readily found an excuse for the journey, and a note through the post-office resulted in an interview with Skates the day after his arrival in New York. They met in the office of the hotel at which Bement was registered. He was looking dreamily out of a window into the storm as Skates entered and stood before him.

A close observer alone would have noticed that they recognized each other; but in a few minutes Orville called for the key of his room, and Skates leisurely followed him up the main stairway.

Before reaching the room Orville had decided how to act. He appreciated that he was at the mercy of Skates, and thought it better to placate than to defy him. Entering the room and locking the door behind them, Bement extended his hand with an appearance of sincerity, and in a low tone exclaimed:

"I am delighted to see you, my old friend! I saw your notice in the *Herald*, and hastened here to meet you!"

"It was very kind in you!" replied Skates, with a smile which his companion could not quite understand.

"Yes, I hastened here to meet you," resumed Bement, "as I feared from the strange wording of the advertisement that you suspected that I had visited the Kanaka creek *cache* in violation of our agreement; when the fact is, I was suddenly called from California by the dangerous illness of my

mother, and was content then, as I am now, that you and Brakey should share the gold between you. The part I took in that affair was for revenge, not money."

"Well, I went for the swag," returned Skates, "and am here to git it. I want my divvy!"

"Why, my dear friend," said Bement, with feigned astonishment, "you do not for a moment suspect that I——"

"Now, sec here, Lew!" interrupted Skates, shaking his finger in Bement's face; "none of that sort o' thing for *me*! You robbed the *cache*, and I know it, and if you don't come to time, I'll *give* you away! That's all there is about it!"

"But, Bill," implored Bement, with assumed emotion, "it is positively cruel in you to imagine that I could be guilty of——"

"I've told you already that that sort of gammon won't go down with me," again interrupted Skates, "and I'm in dead earnest! Once for all, are you ready to ante?"

"No!" hissed Bement defiantly, for he was now satisfied that Skates was not to be conciliated with soft words.

"No," repeated Skates, with a significant protrusion of his lower jaw. "Did I understand you to say *no*? Then by the Everlastin' God, I'll squeal, if it swings both of us!"

"Do it if you dare!" growled Bement, shaking his clenched fist in the face of Skates. "Do it if



you dare, Bill Skates!" he repeated. "It will be simply a question of veracity between a gentleman and a State's prison convict, and I do not fear the result!"

"A *gentleman!*" sneered Skates. "Ha! ha! ha! —a *gentleman!* When did murderers begin to be known by that name? But don't imagine that you and I will be the only witnesses. Another will take the stand when I give the word—and it won't be Brakey, either—who had a square look at your face and recognized you on the night of the Brady's Bar robbery. And he *is* a gentleman. And do you think that Jennie, the girl you betrayed into a mock marriage and called your wife, does not know that you robbed and murdered Grant Bouton? Why, you're at the very foot of the gallows, and I'm the chap that can touch the spring and swing you off!"

"Who is the other witness to the Brady's Bar robbery?" inquired Bement with assumed calmness, but with a perceptible tremor in his voice. He recollected the story of the correspondent, in which reference was made to a young man who had removed the body of Jesse Brinton from the burning cabin.

"That is *my* business!" answered Skates, with an unsympathetic glance into Orville's troubled face.

"How did you become possessed of the information?" inquired Bement.

"Also my private property," was the irritating response.





From the Illustrated London News.

"Well, if there is such a witness, does he know my name?" persisted Bement.

"Don't you wish you knew?" responded Skates, mysteriously. "But you may just as well take out your suction, for I can't be pumped!"

"Will you answer me one question?" continued Bement.

"Not a question till you begin to talk business," replied Skates, firmly.

"You *shall* answer me!" hissed Bement, with a wild glare in his eyes; and with his left hand seizing Skates by the coat collar, with the other he attempted to draw a knife from the inside breast pocket of his coat.

Skates understood and was prepared for the movement, for he sprang back, loosening the grip upon his collar, and the next moment Bement was looking down the barrel of a revolver, which Skates had discreetly held cocked in his overcoat pocket during the interview.

"Don't draw your cheese-knife, Lew!" said Skates, coolly. "If you do, I shall have to commence throwing something that you can't catch in your hands!"

"Well, put up your pistol," growled Bement, sulkily withdrawing his hand from his pocket. "There is no good in our quarreling. Now, what do you want?"

"Since you're beginnin' to talk like a sensible man," replied Skates, replacing the cocked pistol

carefully in his pocket and keeping his hand upon it, "I won't be unreasonable. An even five thousand will do me. You can settle with Brakey if you ever come across him."

Since Bement did not seem to know it, Skates did not think it best to inform him of Brakey's death, and thereby relieve his mind of the fear of another witness.

"Will that end your demands?" asked Bement.

"It'll make me forgit that you're livin'," was the accommodating reply.

"Well, then, remain here for half an hour, and I will be back with the money," said Bement, moving toward the door.

"I couldn't think of putting you to all that trouble," returned Skates, closely watching his treacherous companion. "And you might forget to come back, you know, and then there'd be more trouble, and I might be forced to advertise again. I guess I'll go with you. I'm pretty well dressed, and we won't make a bad-looking couple on the street!"

"Very well," replied Bement, grinding his teeth; "but I am not especially proud of your company."

"But I am of yours," said Skates, "and never felt more like stickin' to you than I do now. And then, you're a gentleman, I believe you told me. In fact, I should a' known it if you'd never said anything about your high standin', and it's an honor, you know, to be seen in the street with you!"

Without deigning the reply to the sarcasm, Bement proceeded to the street, followed by his watchful companion. He walked rapidly and without looking behind him until he reached the bank upon which his drafts had been drawn.

As he entered the building, he turned and observed Skates at the threshold. He had followed him like a shadow ; and now satisfied that escape or further evasion was out of the question, Bement reluctantly presented a draft for payment. As during his stay in New York he had drawn considerable money on his drafts, he was identified by the cashier, and the paper was honored at once.

Remaining at the counter until he had made a separate roll of the money designed for Skates, he left the building, quietly beckoning him to follow. The intimation was entirely unnecessary, as Skates had seen the money paid, and had no idea of losing sight of his slippery companion.

In a rapid walk Bement started back to the hotel, expecting to pay the money to Skates in his room, and receive in return the name of the mysterious witness to the Brady's Bar robbery ; but as he did not know the name—for it will be recollected that Mark evaded the inquiry in Sacramento—Skates concluded to secure the money at once, and get out of Bement's sight, if possible, before reaching the hotel.

Finding it difficult to overtake Bement, and fear-

ful of losing sight of altogether, Skates brought him to a halt by recklessly bellowing :

"Hold on, Lew ! I want to speak to you?"

"In God's name, what are you howling *that* name in the street for?" inquired Bement, in a suppressed tone, as Skates approached.

"Because I thought you'd forgot something," replied Skates.

"Here," said Bement, quietly slipping into his hand a roll of bills. "Now come with me to my room"

"Of course I will!" replied Skates; and he dropped behind and hurriedly glanced over the bills to see that the amount was correct. He then stuffed the notes in his pocket with a smile of triumph, and permitted the gap to widen between him and Bement until they were completely separated by the intervening crowd, when he suddenly dodged into an alley, and in a moment was as far beyond the reach of his companion as if an ocean rolled between them.

Arriving at his hotel, Bement stood at the door for an hour, looking up and down the street. He then became satisfied that Skates had dodged him intentionally, and after ordering a fire, returned to his room, where he remained during the rest of the day. He had learned enough to convince him that his presence in New York was attended with some peril, and deemed it prudent to avoid observation as far as possible.

Early in the evening he was startled by a knock at his door. He opened it, and the waiter handed him a letter. It was addressed "Orville Bement, Esq., Metropolitan Hotel, City." He nervously tore open the envelope and read :

"IN CHOKEY, NEW YORK, }  
"Jan'y 12, 1853. }


*"My Dear Friend:* While following you to your hotel, to-day, I was snatched on a requisition from California. I am charged with robbery and murder. I shall have a preliminary hearing at 11 o'clock to-morrow. The money found in my possession will be strong evidence against me unless you appear and show how I came by it. Don't desert an old friend in trouble.

"Your friend,

"WILLIAM SKATES."

For a few minutes Bement walked the floor excitedly. He did not care what became of Skates, but if he had been arrested on a requisition from California, the inference was reasonable that there was another in the city for Lew Southard. He therefore packed his valise and nervously left for the West on the 8 o'clock train.

Skates saw him from under the brim of his slouch hat as he stepped into the hotel coach, and chuckled maliciously as he walked away, muttering to himself : "I thought that note would start him.





He's treacherous enough to put up a job on me, and it's better that he should be out of the city. Ha! ha! ha! and haven't I flung a handful of nettles in his bed! He'll imagine there's an army of peelers after him! He's too mean for a respectable thief! He ought to be an alderman!"

It was with a feeling of relief that Bement returned to Brinton. It was the only spot where he had felt at all secure since believing that Skates had been arrested on a requisition from California. Instead of allaying his fears, his visit to New York had tended, rather, to increase his apprehension of coming calamity; but he consoled himself with the belief that he now knew the worst, and was better prepared to meet it, no matter from what quarter the menace might come.

A few days after Bement's return to Brinton, from New York, a circumstance occurred which tended to somewhat hasten the concluding events of our story of a few plain Western people.

Four or five months before Lucy had accompanied Mr. Brinton to New York on his semi-annual business visit. They remained in the city two or three weeks. While there Lucy made the acquaintance of the junior member of a hardware house with which Mr. Brinton had dealt for years. He was well connected socially, and in every respect companionable, and his attentions to Lucy rendered her brief visit unusually agreeable. There was a freshness about the handsome Western girl that

charmed the New Yorker, and he begged the privilege of corresponding with her after her return home. A number of gossip letters passed between them, and a marriage proposal finally followed. It was received the day after Orville's return from New York, and he soon heard of it by the round-about way in which strictly private intelligence of that character usually travels.

After learning that the man he had robbed and murdered on Brady's Bar was Lucy's uncle, Orville's old-time ease and vivacity in her presence left him, and there was a restraint in their intercourse which she could not understand ; but as she not unreasonably construed it into a timidity always complimentary to a modest and pure-minded woman, it redounded rather to his advantage than otherwise ; and when he hastened to anticipate the answer of his New York rival, and offered her his heart and hand, with the avowal that he had loved her since childhood, her heart made no response, while her lips sadly answered :

"I do not know that I am capable of loving any one as I imagine a wife should love ; but since it seems to be the wish of our parents, I am prepared to gratify them, even should the union bring unhappiness to both of us."

The florid sentences he had framed for the occasion froze on his lips at Lucy's cold acceptance ; but he was content that she had consented to be-

come his wife, and too happy to cavil at the language in which she had done it.

That night the vision of Lucy's sweet face almost banished the shadows from the bedside of young Bement ; but had he seen the sad face itself, he would scarcely have wondered at the tears that wet the pillow upon which it rested.

The next day Lucy terminated the correspondence with her New York admirer by informing him of her engagement, and made joyful the hearts of her parents with the announcement, timidly made to her mother, that she had given her hand to Orville Bement.

"And I hope your heart, too, Lucy," said her mother, "for hands are poor gifts in marriage without hearts."

"I do not dislike him," replied Lucy, quietly.

"I should hope not!" continued the mother, looking curiously at the girl.

"Do all marry for love?" inquired Lucy.

"Perhaps not all," replied the mother ; "but it would be better for all, I think, if they did."

"Then those who love should not be separated," said Lucy, musingly.

"Well, Orville, I am sure, will make you a good husband, and I hope you may both be happy." Then turning to the grandmother, Mrs. Brinton continued :

"What do you think of Lucy's choice, mother?"

"She might have done better," replied the old lady, quietly ; "but the child is not married yet."

Orville had never been a favorite with Grandmother Brinton, and she was frank enough to withhold her congratulations ; but when Lucy threw her arms around her neck, she wiped her eyes and said, kindly :

"I hope it is for the best, child ; I hope it is for the best !"

The Bements were delighted at the engagement, and the next day the doctor called upon Mr. Brinton at his store, and expressed his gratification that the two oldest families in the village were about to be united by a tie stronger than that of friendship.

Lucy would not consent to an earlier marriage than the first of May. All except the grandmother favored less delay, and Orville was especially importunate ; but Lucy was resolute, and that was the date finally fixed for the ceremony.

In anticipation of the marriage, after a brief negotiation Orville purchased a half interest in Mr. Brinton's mercantile business, with the understanding that he was to give it his personal attention. As already mentioned, Mr. Brinton's financial affairs were in an embarrassing condition. The most of his realty was mortgaged, and Eastern merchants held his notes for large purchases. His books contained solvent accounts to the amount of more than his entire indebtedness ; but the most of them could not be collected until after the next

harvest, and ready money was required to meet the notes in the interval falling due.

This Orville was able to furnish, and his admission into the business enabled Mr. Brinton not only to lift the mortgages from his property, but to promptly meet his obligations as they fell due, and re-establish the old house on a cash basis.

A substantial increase in the business of the concern followed, and the affairs of the old merchant, embarrassed by credits and disastrous outside speculations, again took a prosperous turn.

And thus the winter wore away—Orville seeking relief from his thoughts in incessant toil, and Brinton more than satisfied with his unexpected industry.

As soon as the day had been fixed for the marriage, Lucy wrote to Martha Bouton, informing her of what had occurred, and expressing a hope that circumstances might enable her to visit Brinton about that time. "You seem more like a sister to me than ever," wrote Lucy, "now that poor Grant is gone, and I feel a happiness in loving a sister who was so dear to him. Be with me on the first of May if you possibly can. I do not look forward to the event with the joy I should, perhaps, and your presence will strengthen me."

## CHAPTER XXII.

*Snowed in on Braxton's Bar.—The journey to New York.  
—Bement in a Trap.—Mark creates a Sensation.*



THE winter of 1852-3 was unusually severe in the mountains of California, and from a lack of adequate supplies, due in a measure to an unreasonable advance in San Francisco prices during the autumn months, when the storms of winter closed the trails, widespread destitution prevailed in the snow-bound camps. In a number of populous localities everything capable of sustaining human life was consumed, and many perished in desperate attempts to open communication to points of supply from storm-beleaguered mining settlements.


From November until the middle of March the trails from Braxton's Bar to the divide were impassable most of the time ; but that did not completely shut from the outside world the little party remaining there in voluntary imprisonment, for Joe was an expert snow-shoe traveler, and as often as once a week scaled the trackless snow-drifts overlooking the bar, and returned with letters, papers and occa-

sional luxuries for the table. But the general supplies of the cabin were abundant, and want was neither felt nor feared.

It was a happy winter to all in that snow-environed shelter in the gorge. Around the comfortable fire which never died out on the hearth, they spent their leisure hours in reading, writing and exchanging the incidents of their lives, while Mark's flute furnished infinite amusement to Jennie as she instructed her awkward but good-natured husband in a few of the fundamental graces of the ball-room.

In return Joe made her a pair of light snow-shoes, and taught her how to use them ; but she never ventured beyond the flat, for she soon discovered that they abounded in treacherous tricks well calculated to shake the confidence of a novice in their general good behavior.

Jennie had re-opened a correspondence with her relatives in Iowa, and every mail from the East brought letters to the cabin. Grant heard from Martha with regularity, the letters always coming inclosed in an envelope directed to "Joseph Braxton, Esq.," and through her from Brinton ; and Mark began to feel that he was neglected unless she answered his numerous letters promptly. After reading them, Grant always passed to Mark his letters from Martha ; but the reciprocity never extended beyond the exhibition by Mark of a brief extract, with the



sheet so folded as to render invisible the lines preceding and following it

Although what had passed between them was a matter of surmise to Grant, Mark had in one way or another developed enough of the character of their correspondence to satisfy him that considerable epistolary billing and cooing was going on. And the thought was exceedingly gratifying to him. Without any knowledge of his history, he would have scarcely hesitated to intrust to Mark the happiness of his sister; but now that he knew who he was, and that the explanation of the mystery which for a time enshrouded his life had brought to him no reproach, he felt that Martha was especially fortunate in possessing the love of such a man.

In the latter part of February a letter from Martha announced the arrival of Orville Bement in Brinton, and the next mail brought the intelligence of his approaching marriage with Lucy.

Grant's hand trembled as he passed the letter to Mark, and then he went to the little window and stared vacantly out upon the cheerless landscape. Mark held the half-folded letter in his hand, and sat thinking as Grant returned.

"Well?" interrogated the latter, after a pause. His face wore an expression of suffering; but his lips were compressed, and there was a calm look of resolution in his eyes which seemed to render the brief question useless.

"Well?" repeated Mark, looking up.



"I am now sure that she loves Bement," said Grant, with terrible earnestness. "God help her! But I will strangle him at the altar before she shall become his victim!"

"As a last resort, the marriage might possibly be prevented by the strangling process suggested," replied Mark, coolly; "but I hope no such unseemly exhibition of your prowess will be necessary."

Grant walked the floor excitedly for a moment, and then resumed his seat.

"You are excited," continued Mark. "Now, let me say a word or two before you make up your mind to break some one in two. We believe Lew Southard to be the murderer of Jesse Brinton; in fact, I know he is. We believe he was one of the gang who robbed and attempted to murder you. We know he betrayed Jennie into a fraudulent marriage, and the affidavit of Skates shows, what she can establish beyond a peradventure, that Lew Southard and Orville Bement are one. Now, it can scarcely be otherwise than that one of the men I saw behind the cabin on Brady's Bar was the owner of the hat which Jennie shot from the head of some one—and she says he was Lew Southard—on the night of the robbery here, as beneath the lining was found the fly-leaf which I certainly saw in his or some one's hand a few minutes after the murder of Uncle Jesse."

"I see," said Grant; "it is a strong circumstantial case; but there is no *positive* evidence that



Lew Southard was engaged in the robbery here, and the Brady's Bar connection is therefore incomplete."

"True, but listen," resumed Mark. "I have promised not to involve Skates in the matter, and do not know that I could find him, even if there was no such understanding; but should Jennie recognize Bement as Lew Southard, which of course she can; and should the hat fit his head, as I believe it will; and should there be found a mark across his scalp corresponding with the bullet-holes in the hat, with hair identical in color and texture with that which the bullet tore from the head and left behind, then have we a chain of evidence strong enough to condemn him in Brinton, if not to convince a California jury of his guilt. But I *know* him to be guilty, even if it cannot be satisfactorily shown to a jury, and I am prepared to charge him with the murder of Jesse Brinton, and will do so, whenever and wherever we meet on earth!"

"You are right," said Grant, after listening to this brief summing-up of the case; "we have evidence enough to crush him with suspicion, if not to consign him to the gallows, and we will to Brinton and confront him with it!"

"Now you are talking reasonably," exclaimed Mark. "Do not be alarmed. Lucy will never marry Orville Bement. Skates' affidavit alone would be sufficient to prevent that. Everything is working as it should. We have trapped him at last,



and will drop down upon him like a thunderbolt. He has the blood of the Brintons on his hands, and shall not escape !”

As the letter of Martha embraced the information that she had been earnestly invited by Lucy to be present at the marriage, Grant requested her to accept the invitation, with the promise that he would meet her in Brinton before the 1st day of May. He also mentioned in his letter that Mark might possibly accompany him, but enjoined upon her the strictest secrecy in regard to their coming.

With the understanding that they were all to leave San Francisco for New York by the first steamer in April, the little party waited impatiently for the return of spring, and the disappearance of the snows which had so long sheeted the hill-sides.

February passed, and March came and was going, before they finally left the bar. The claim, cabin and all it contained were transferred to the ownership and possession of the Scullys—not to Mr. Scully, but jointly to the butcher and his wife. So read the memorandum of transfer, which Joe advised Mrs. Scully to have placed upon record—the plain object being to give them a bone of contention for two or three years to come.

There were tears in Jennie’s eyes as she reached the divide, and turned to look down for the last time upon the spot which for more than six months had been her home. She had fled to it a poor and friendless outcast—proud, but desperate and al-

most heart-broken—and was leaving it a beloved and loving wife, and with a future so rich in promise, so golden in hope, that she could scarcely refrain from doubting a reality which cast such peaceful shadows through the years to come.

Joe noticed her tears as she turned and looked down the cañon, and must have understood their meaning, for he said, kindly,

"Yes, Jennie, you have made it a happy home for both of us, but we will find another where the skies are just as bright!"

"God bless you, Joe!" replied Jennie, with a face beaming with love and gratitude; "wherever you are, to me the skies will always be cloudless!"

Mark had drafts to purchase in Sacramento, where his money had been deposited, and Grant's property in San Francisco, which was steadily increasing in value, required some attention; but a week before the steamer sailed every necessary preparation for the journey had been made, and Joe devoted the remainder of his stay in the city to a study of the manners and customs of the white settlements, as he expressed it.

He was especially proud of Jennie, for he observed that she moved and acted very much like the fashionably-dressed ladies on the street, and at the hotel where they were stopping, and was one evening struck dumb with amazement at seeing her seated at the piano in the parlor and running over the keys with the touch of a skilled performer.

He believed she was the handsomest woman in the city, if not in the world, and there seemed to be but one thing necessary to render her in every respect the most superb in appearance. It was more jewelry. He observed ladies who were more bountifully supplied with ornaments of that character, and but for the protests of Jennie would have filled her ears and fingers with diamonds.

To please her, he dressed fashionably and with taste, and studied the proprieties and suffered the restraints of city life, and it was not long before he could eat almost as well with a fork as with a butcher-knife.

Finally the day of departure arrived. As Joe looked out upon the broad waters he was not enraptured with the vision. The ocean appeared to be a mighty desert, with neither lizards nor horned-toads to stave off starvation. But he boldly stepped aboard the steamer with Jennie on his arm, and an hour after moving from the wharf wished he was on the Laramie Plains with a lame mule and two hundred miles from water. The question of supplies suddenly ceased to interest him. The weather was rough, and his stomach had not been in such a state of rebellion since he drank from the poison spring on the Big Blue; and when Mark came to his relief, almost as pale as himself, he threatened to jump overboard unless he was taken to his stateroom to die. But he soon recovered, and before reaching New York expressed a regret that he had

not taken to the sea instead of the prairies when a boy.

In excellent health and spirits our little party landed in New York, and the same day started West, for the first of May was near at hand, and Grant feared to lose a single moment. In fact, there was scarcely a moment to spare, for the steamer had been delayed one day at Aspinwall, and the speediest conveyances and shortest routes were taken, as the party by rail and steamer, and almost without halting, sped on their way to Brinton.

Leaving the most of their luggage at the nearest railway station, which they reached at midnight, they arrived at Kenyonville on the morning of the first of May. As the rapid night-ride over rough roads had been fatiguing to Jennie, and their destination was but a few miles distant, Mark thought they might safely remain in Kenyonville until afternoon, and then comfortably finish their journey in an hour or two by private conveyance.

It had been understood from Martha's letters that the marriage ceremony would take place at the Brinton mansion at 8 o'clock in the evening, but Mark incidentally learned through the landlord's daughter that for some reason there had been a change in the arrangement, and that the rites would be celebrated at the Episcopal Church at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

This information did not reach him until after

12 o'clock in the day. Without alarming Grant with what he had heard, Mark mounted a horse as soon as one could be procured, and dashed wildly up the road to Brinton, leaving with the party the injunction to meet him there without fail before sundown.

When Mark reached the principal hotel in Brinton it lacked but a few minutes of 2 o'clock. He dismounted, tossing the reins of his horse to the stable-boy, and looked toward the church. The main door was open, but no one was visible at the entrance.

He entered the hotel, washed the dust from his face and hair, and in a few minutes stepped into the street in a presentable condition. He again looked toward the church. It was on the site of the old structure with which he had become familiar in the past, but was larger and more pretentious. A lady and gentleman were just entering, and a number of boys were lounging around the door. He looked at his watch, which he had regulated at Kenyonville, and found it 2 o'clock. He scarcely knew how to proceed, and no time was left for reflection. It had been his purpose to proceed to the Brinton mansion, but it was half a mile from the hotel, and could not now be reached in time.

"They are doubtless now on their way," he thought, "and I must meet them there, if at all;" and with his eyes to the ground to avoid observation, he walked hastily to the church and entered.

A number of the front seats were already filled, and he passed leisurely down the aisle and seated himself near the altar. No one seemed to recognize him. Nor was it strange, for little, indeed, did his brown and unshaven face resemble that of Mark Briggs as he left Brinton four years before.

In a few minutes the sound of wheels was heard at the door, and amid whispers of : "Here they come !" "Here they are !" Lucy Brinton on the arm of her father walked slowly down the aisle and was seated at the left of the altar. She was paler than usual, but all thought her exceedingly beautiful. She was accompanied by the remainder of the Brinton family and two or three young ladies, one of whom Mark recognized as Martha Bouton. As his eyes fell upon her sweet face, his heart reached out to her with a yearning which would not be appeased, and he almost rose to his feet with her name upon his lips ; but at that instant came sweeping down the aisle the handsome face and form of Orville Bement, with two or three friends and the members of the family. They took seats at the right of the altar, before which the officiating clergyman soon appeared in his conventional gown of white, and the bride and groom were requested to come forward.

Martha was the only one of the party who seemed to be agitated, and Mark the only one present who understood the cause. All that day and the day before she had looked for Grant, and perhaps for



some one else. She had promised under no circumstance to reveal the secret of her brother's recovery. She did not know why the promise had been exacted, or in what manner it could affect the ceremony which she was there to witness; yet she felt satisfied that Grant's promised return in some way referred to the marriage, and as the bride and groom were called to the altar she glanced up and down the aisles with a look of disappointment and anguish which Mark could with difficulty restrain himself from dissipating at once by the announcement of his presence.

Two or three times during the day, when alone with Lucy, Martha had been on the verge of telling her of Grant's recovery and expected return; but his repeated injunctions to sacredly guard the secret continually rose before her, and she had withheld the information until it was too late to devulge it. But, whatever might be the result, she felt that the fault was not hers, and while her heart was rent with grief, her step was firm and reliant as she took her place beside Lucy at the altar.

Everything being in readiness, in the midst of a breathless silence the clergyman began the ceremony. He slowly proceeded, and had finished the passage, "If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace," Mark rose to his feet and approached the altar.

A thrill ran through the assemblage, and every



eye eagerly sought his face as he turned to the clergyman, and in a clear, firm voice, said :

"In response to your request, I am here, reverend sir, to protest against the completion of this ceremony !"

"This is a serious moment, sir," replied the clergyman, after recovering from the shock of an announcement so unexpected ; "and I demand to know the reasons for your interruption of these solemn rites !"

"One reason, perhaps, will be sufficient for the present," said Mark. "I charge that this man, Orville Bement, has already been married to a woman who is still living, and from whom he has not been divorced !"

"It is false !" exclaimed Orville, taking a step menacingly toward Mark.

"Is it false ?" returned his accuser, turning to Orville with a pitiless look. "You *know* the charge is true, and I am prepared to prove it !"

"And who are you ?" inquired Dr. Bement, excitedly. "I believe you are a liar, sir ; but what is your name ?"

"I may possibly be known to some of you as Mark Briggs !" was the calm response.

During this scene, to catch the meaning of which the entire audience had pressed forward to the altar, Lucy had been reseated, where she remained a pale and bewildered listener, while Martha, with her eyes fixed with a strange fascination upon Mark's face,

stood speechless, with her hand pressed against her heart to still its throbbings; but when he pronounced his name, a mist rose before her, and she sank back helplessly into her seat.

"Mark Briggs! I remember him now!" said Orville, loftily, addressing the clergyman. "A characterless adventurer, who worked for a few months in a blacksmith shop here, some four or five years ago. I trust you will pay no attention to his baseless charge, but order his removal from the church!" There was a wicked fire in the eyes of Mark as he raised his finger and said:

"An adventurer, perhaps, but not a murderer, Orville Bement!"

"This is monstrous!" exclaimed the doctor. "Throw this lunatic into the street, and let the ceremony proceed!"

"Excuse me, sir," said Mark, now thoroughly master of himself as well as of the situation. "You seem to be excited. I have made a charge which renders impossible the completion of the ceremony at this time, and I will hold him responsible before the law who attempts to complete it! I therefore demand that it be deferred, and if I fail to make good the charge before eight o'clock this evening, I promise to withdraw it."

This seemed to appeal to the clergyman, and after some hesitation he said:

"The charge is of a character so serious that I do not feel authorized to proceed with the cere-

mony ; and since the party making it alleges that he has proof to substantiate it, I deem it advisable to await its production."

"This is disgraceful !" hissed the doctor ; "but there seems to be no help for it !" Then turning to Mark with freezing politeness, he bowed low and continued : "At what hour and at what place may we expect the honor of hearing from you again ?"

"With the permission of Mr. Brinton, I will meet as many of you as choose to be present at his residence at precisely seven o'clock this evening," was the equally polite response.

Mr. Brinton, who had been an astounded but silent spectator of what had occurred, simply bowed his head in assent, and giving his arm to Lucy, left the church, succeeded by Martha and the family. They were immediately followed by the Bements and their friends, and Mark was left alone at the altar with the clergyman.

"I especially request that you may be present this evening," said Mark.

"I shall endeavor to be there," was the answer ; and Mark passed from the church between two long lines of wondering faces, and hurriedly returned to the hotel.

Like a prairie fire the news of what had occurred at the altar swept through the village, and at once became the engrossing theme of conversation. Mark retired to his room, and throwing himself upon a lounge, contemplated with satisfaction the effects

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of the bomb he had exploded under the feet of Orville Bement. For Lucy's sake he would have made the affair less public; but his arrival at almost the very moment fixed for the marriage left him no alternative.

He knew that Bement had not been legally married to Jennie Newland; but the charge was the only one that could serve his purpose in the emergency, and it now remained for him to await the arrival of his companions from Kenyonville, and substitute the graver charges of robbery and murder.

The Brinton family returned home in silence. Mr. Brinton's face wore a troubled expression, and when asked by Mrs. Brinton what he thought of the charge, replied that he feared it was not without foundation. But why should Mark Briggs, who was scarcely known to them, take so conspicuous an interest in the matter? This was a question which neither could answer, and nothing was left them but to await the developments of the evening.

Accompanied by Martha, Lucy proceeded at once to her room. Her face was still pale, but her eyes were tearless. Had she really loved Bement, despair would have overwhelmed her; but she did not, and her heart was a chaos of conflicting emotions. With no love to plead for him, her judgment coolly held the scales, and she could not deem him guiltless. She keenly felt the humiliation of her position, but indignation at the attempted im-

position was the controlling sentiment, and she determined to resolutely meet the issue. In the face of the wrong of which she feared she had been made a victim, her womanhood asserted itself, and she resolved to sit in judgment in her own defense.

In silence she removed her gloves, and laid off the wreath and vail which seemed to be a mockery. While Martha's sympathy went out to her in tears, she could with difficulty disguise the satisfaction she felt at the interruption of the ceremony, and the joy that filled her heart at the opportune appearance of Mark. She thought it probable that Grant might be in the village, but scarcely dared to open her lips lest the joyous suspicion might leap from her heart.

A light knock, and the grandmother opened the door. Her eyes sought Lucy's face, and a smile came to her own as she saw it was calm.

"That is right, child," she said, cheerfully ; "you are bearing it as you should."

"You have seen more of the world than I have, Granny," said Lucy, throwing her arms around her neck. "Do you think he is guilty?"

"I am not his judge, child," was the old lady's evasive answer.

"Nor I," ventured Martha ; "but I know Mark to be incapable of falsehood!"

"We shall see—we shall see!" nodded the grandmother, smiling, as she left the room, at Martha's prompt and reckless assertion of Mark's integrity.

Orville Bement was not at all at ease with the situation. He declared the charge to be false, and his relatives were satisfied. But the marriage, of which he knew there was no legal record, was the least of his troubles. He had never seen or heard of Mark in California, but knowing him to have been the friend of Grant Bouton, and his knowledge of the marriage rendering reasonable the assumption that he had met Jennie Newland, he feared developments of a graver character than the betrayal of a simple-minded girl into a fraudulent marriage.

It was therefore with a feeling of dread that he contemplated the meeting at the Brinton mansion that evening. But it could not be avoided, and he nerved himself for the occasion by trying to believe that his accuser knew nothing of his misdeeds in California beyond the marriage, of which he had perhaps accidentally heard, but of which he could produce no proof sufficient to outweigh his individual denial.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

*End of the Drama at the Brinton Mansion.—Bement on Trial.—Two Marriages.—The Conclusion.*



NE of the windows of Mark's room at the hotel in Brinton looked out upon the Kenyonville road, and eagerly did he watch for the coming of his companions. He had hooked the monster, but his line was too frail to land him without assistance.

At four o'clock he began to grow uneasy, and when the hands of his watch pointed to five, he sprang nervously to his feet, and thought of ordering his horse for a dash down the road.

But a moment after his apprehensions were relieved. First a cloud of dust was seen ; then a carriage ; and just as he reached the foot of the stairs his friends drew up at the door. As Mark had engaged rooms, the parties were shown to them at once, but without giving them time to wipe the dust from their faces, he drew them together in his own room and related the events of the afternoon.

"Bravely done !" said Grant, after he had recovered from his astonishment.



"It's almost like a novel, isn't it, Joe?" exclaimed Jennie, her eyes lighting up with curiosity and excitement.

"A whole cupboard full of novels!" replied Joe. "But I begin to see through the business at last. Then Lew Southard is here under another name, and you've trapped him! Is that so?"

"I think we have trapped him at last," replied Grant.

"And you knew him before he went to California?" continued Joe.

"Yes."

"And he robbed us and thought he had murdered you?"

Grant nodded.

"And you wanted him to believe he had let out your light?"

"Yes."

"And he did believe it, and scooted back here?"

"Exactly."

"And he's splurgin' round on our money?"

"Doubtless."

"And you knew he was Lew Southard all the time?"

"Pretty sure of it."

"And Mark bu'sted in on his marriage this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"And you're mighty glad of it?"

Grant could not deny it.

"Now, if you'd both happen to love the same gal, we'd have a first-class play ready made, with the curtain about to go up for the last act." Then turning to Mark, he continued :

"But you're a good one, Mark ; and if I understand the turns in the trail, we'll hole our 'coon to-night !"

"But I must lead the hunt, remember," said Mark, as the party separated, "for I am better prepared for it than either you or Grant imagine. I have done a little telegraphing, and shall be ready for rough work if it is required. I have something to attend to that will occupy me for half an hour, perhaps, and will meet you all at the supper-table at precisely six o'clock."

Promptly at 7 o'clock Grant and Mark, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Braxton, were at the door of the Brinton mansion. They had passed through the village in silence, and attracted but little attention. Mark rang the bell, and requested the servant to inform Mr. Brinton that a gentleman awaited his presence at the door. In a moment Mr. Brinton made his appearance. He recognized Mark, and greeted him cordially.

A few words passed between them in a low tone, and then Mr. Brinton conducted the party through the hall and dining-room into his own apartment, which also communicated with the parlor. He then withdrew, after a polite word of welcome to his unknown visitors, whose names were not mentioned,

but one of whom, he did not fail to observe, was a charming young woman, while her companions were men whose appearance and bearing seemed to command respect.

Mark soon followed, with the parting information that the witnesses would be called for as they were wanted. He entered the parlor, and was astonished to find that the most of those whom he had expected to meet were already there. Among the number were Orville, Dr. and Mrs. Bement, the elder members of the Brinton family and the clergyman. Lucy and Martha were both present, and between them sat Orville, with an assumed air of confidence and unconcern.

With a polite bow to the whole company, Mark crossed the room and took a proffered seat near the clergyman. With him he exchanged a few words of little import while he looked at Martha, and over the verge of her fan she caught his glances, and the roses behind it grew redder on her cheeks.

After an awkward silence, which no one seemed disposed to break, Dr. Bement wriggled nervously in his chair, and then venomously inquired :

"Well, what are we here for?"

The question was evidently intended for Mark, and he rose to his feet and replied :

"For more reasons than one. But first permit me to substantiate the charge I publicly made to-day, that Orville Bement was married in California

to a woman who is still living and from whom he has not been divorced."

He stepped to the door of Mr. Brinton's room, and opening it, Mr. and Mrs. Braxton entered the parlor. They were shown to seats, when Mark, pointing to Orville, said :

"Mrs. Braxton, do you know this man?"

"I do," replied Jennie, modestly. "His name is Lewis Southard. I once believed him to be my husband, for he betrayed me into a fraudulent marriage with him in Sacramento, something over a year ago."

"A shallow conspiracy!" exclaimed Orville, springing to his feet. "I never saw the woman before, or she me, to my knowledge!"

"See here, Lew Southard, or whatever your name may be!" roared Joe, glaring at the offender with the look of a hungry wolf. "You married this woman, and you know it, and if you dare to dispute her word, I'll make you think you've struck the butt end of a whirlwind!"

"Is she your wife?" inquired Orville.

"Yes, *Sir*!" replied Joe, emphatically.

"Then it is plain that she cannot be mine," returned Orville, with a smile indicative of a final settlement of the matter.

"A very reasonable conclusion," said Mark, with a deferential bow. "But as you are not exactly on trial for bigamy, and these proceedings are altogether informal, I request the reading of this paper."

He drew from his pocket the affidavit of Skates, and handed it to the clergyman, who proceeded to read it aloud. At its conclusion, and before Orville had recovered from his consternation, he again turned to the clergyman and said :

"Since the marriage was fraudulent, and the lady no longer bears his name, I withdraw the charge!"

There was a buzz of satisfaction among the Bements, and Lucy turned upon Orville a look of scorn so withering that he could not misunderstand the meaning.

"As the charge has been withdrawn," said the doctor—and he was somewhat less arrogant than before the reading of the affidavit—"I see no reason why the ceremony should not now be completed."

"But I do!" said Mark. "I withdraw the charge that Orville Bement is already legally married, and substitute that of murder and robbery!"

At the terrible words, slowly and deliberately pronounced, a shudder ran through the room, and Orville's face was ashy as he exclaimed :

"Mr. Brinton, I ask that this lunatic be removed ! If he does not leave the room, I will !"

"Don't be in a hurry about it !" said Joe, crossing the room and taking a position at the door leading into the hall.

"What does all this mean?" well-nigh shrieked the doctor. "I demand an explanation!"

"You shall have it in a moment," replied Mark, coolly ; and he stepped into Mr. Brinton's room,

and re-appeared with an old slouch hat in his hand.

"Now, sir," continued Mark, addressing the doctor, "if this hat does not fit the head of Orville Bement, and if there is not across his scalp from right to left the mark of the bullet which made these holes, and if Mrs. Braxton, who fired the shot, will not say that he is the man at which the pistol was aimed, then I will apologize for this intrusion and quit the room!"

The doctor started as he recollected that Orville's head bore the mark of just such a wound, scarcely visible beneath the hair, which had been otherwise accounted for; and when Mark handed him the hat he refused to receive it, and Orville fiercely struck it to the floor.

A breathless silence followed, and with a smile of triumph Mark proceeded:

"I make these inquiries principally to satisfy myself, for the man from whose head this hat was shot robbed and murdered Grant Bouton on Braxton's Bar!"

All eyes sought the face of Orville, but it was pale and motionless as marble.

Then taking from his pocket the little Bible snatched from the burning cabin, and opening it, Mark continued:

"And the same man tore a fly-leaf from this book after he had robbed and murdered its owner, an old man, on Brady's Bar. The leaf was found in the

lining of this hat when it was picked up on Braxton's Bar. I, myself, saw the assassin a few minutes after the murder, and heard him admit the crime. That old man, whose body I dragged from the flames of his burning cabin, was my uncle, Jesse Brinton, and there stands his murderer, Orville Bement !”

Under these dreadful developments Orville stood horror-stricken and speechless, while the doctor sank into his chair with a groan. Lucy rose to her feet with a wild look, and would have fallen but for the assistance of Martha.

“Great God ! is all this true ?” exclaimed Mr. Brinton, coming forward and grasping Mark by the hand. “Then you are Allen Warner !”

“Yes,” was the reply ; “Mark Briggs no longer, but Allen Warner, your nephew ! There is no taint upon the name now !”

Before the remainder of the family could give expression to their wonder, Mark turned to the clergyman and said :

“His testimony will perhaps not be required, but I have another important witness whose name has not yet been called.”

He opened the door of Mr. Brinton's room, and, as he pronounced his name, Grant Bouton stepped into the parlor.

With a cry of joy Martha sprang into his outstretched arms, and Lucy fell fainting beside the chair from which she had attempted to rise. Disengaging himself, Grant raised the insensible girl







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in his arms as if she were an infant, and bore her to a lounge in Mr. Brinton's room, where she received the attention of the ladies who hastened to her assistance.

Meantime, Orville had partially recovered from the paralysis of the blow that had been dealt him. His father offered no word of comfort, and his mother sat weeping in her chair. He saw that all was lost, and with the ferocity of a tiger sprang at Mark's throat. But he warded off the assault, and the next moment Orville found himself in the grasp of Joe, who had been watching him closely.

After this venomous demonstration, Mark hesitated no longer. He proceeded to the front door, and two officers, who had been awaiting the summons, returned with him to the parlor.

"There stands your prisoner," said Mark, pointing to Orville. "Do not forget your instructions!"

"By what authority?" inquired Orville, stepping back as the officers approached.

"By virtue of this warrant," replied one of them, exhibiting the instrument, "issued on a requisition from the State of California."

"And what is the charge?" demanded Orville.

"Murder!" was the brief but terrible answer.

His mother sprang forward with a cry of anguish as the handcuffs were placed upon his wrists, and in a few minutes, without a parting word, he was led from the house a prisoner. The family and their friends soon followed, including the clergyman, and

as the door closed behind them Mark said to his uncle :

"My heart bleeds for the poor mother ; but he is a merciless assassin, and I shall return to California to see that he answers for the blood of Uncle Jesse !"

Just then Martha re-entered the room, and in response to a look of inquiry from Mr. Brinton, informed him that Lucy had recovered from her swoon, and there was no cause for any uneasiness.

At the sound of her voice Mark turned, and clasping both of her hands in his, gazed rapturously into her face ; and then gently drawing her aside, he half-whispered :

"Dear Martha, one little Bible, the gift of my mother, I found on Brady's Bar. Four years ago I left another in your keeping. Do you remember it ?"

"Very well. I have kept it for you, Mark."

"And the custodian ?"

"Is yours as well, dear Mark," replied Martha, frankly, "if you think her worth the taking."

"Worth the world !" exclaimed Mark, clasping her to his heart.

"Well, well ! You seem to be getting on bravely !" said Grant, smiling at their happiness, and throwing his great arms around both.

"Another case of bigamy !" exclaimed Mr. Brinton, taking in the situation. "After breaking the heart

of Mark Briggs, Martha, you are now giving yourself to my nephew !”

“She has heart enough for both, uncle,” replied Mark, “but I shall never be content with less than all of it.”

He then formally introduced Mr. and Mrs. Braxton to his uncle, who in turn presented them to his family. He next kissed his grandmother, who was with Lucy, and Mrs. Brinton and Lucy herself, and finally shook hands with the boys, who were delighted with their newly-found cousin.

Feeling a delicacy in longer intruding his presence uninvited, Grant exchanged a few words with his sister, and then said to Mr. Brinton :

“After what has occurred, I presume no apology for my presence here is required. I understand that Orville Bement has recently become connected with you in business.”

Mr. Brinton bowed, and a shadow crossed his face as he thought of the embarrassment which the arrest of his partner might perhaps create ; but the next moment it was dissipated as Grant continued :

“The money invested by him in your business was stolen from Mr. Braxton and myself, and may be readily traced and recovered. But do not allow this to embarrass you in the least. Whatever the amount may be, I will arrange with Mr. Braxton for his portion, and request that you will consider it a loan, to be paid at your convenience.”

These were the words of the sturdy young village

blacksmith, to whom John Brinton had not thought of extending even a parting hand of encouragement as he started on his westward journey but a few years before. This thought probably crossed the mind of Mr. Brinton himself, for with visible emotion he replied :

"I scarcely know how to thank you for a favor so generous and unexpected."

Mark's ear had caught this part of the conversation, and guessing its import, he stepped toward his uncle and remarked :

"I have no desire to interfere with the business I imagine you are discussing, but if the arrest of Bement has anything to do with it, I may as well mention, uncle, that I have in my possession about thirty thousand dollars of the property of Jesse Brinton, which his murderers failed to find and I recovered. It is in money, and any portion of it is at your service. I will undertake to satisfy the other claimants, who are your mother and mine."

"What a land must California be," said Mr. Brinton, in amazement, "when those who return from it talk thus of their thousands! But I thank you both. We will see what is best to be done tomorrow."

"Any time before I leave the village, which will be within two or three days," replied Grant. "And now, if Mr. and Mrs. Braxton are in readiness, we will bid you good-night."

"But you are surely not going, Grant, without

seeing Lucy!" said Mark, reproachfully. "You were friends once, and she would feel neglected."

Grant hesitated, scarcely knowing what to say in the presence of Mr. Brinton, and before he could reply Mark took him by the arm, and leading him into Mr. Brinton's room, there left him, closing the door as he re-entered the parlor.

Lucy and her grandmother were alone in the room. Lucy was lying on a lounge, her eyes closed and her head resting upon a pillow, and in an easy-chair beside her sat the old lady, with her back toward the door. So quiet had been Grant's entrance that he was not observed until he had reached the foot of the lounge.

Lucy opened her eyes, and as they met Grant's quiet gaze, the blood mounted to her pale face, and with the startled exclamation of "Grant Bouton!" she rose to a sitting position and held out her hand.

He clasped and held it for a moment without speaking. His heart seemed to rise in his throat to choke him, and it was with a struggle that he finally said:

"I hope you have recovered from the shock of this evening's terrible business. I was about to return to the hotel, and came to say good-night."

The grandmother rose, and after greeting Grant kindly, offered him her seat, and with the remark that she would be back in a few minutes, left the room. He sank slowly into the vacant chair, and his voice trembled as he said:

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"I hope, Lucy—for I can call you by no other name—that you will not condemn me too harshly for what has occurred. Orville Bement robbed and murdered your uncle. He robbed and attempted to murder me. Yet, believing that you loved him, I have exposed his crimes with reluctance."

"Believing that I loved him!" repeated Lucy, in a tone so low as to be scarcely audible.

"Why doubt it, since you gave him your hand in marriage?" replied Grant.

Lucy buried her face in her hands, and sank back upon the pillow from which she had risen.

"Poor girl! It has been a severe blow to her," thought Grant, gazing at her sadly for a moment. He then rose to take his leave. "Good-night," he said, "and may heaven comfort you!"

Her face was half-hidden in the pillow, and her heart was bleeding, for her lips could not speak the words that would carry healing to it. He took the hand which she extended with an effort. It trembled strangely in his grasp. He pressed it tenderly, and when he would have relinquished it, it clung to his.

"Lucy!" he exclaimed, almost wildly; refolding the little hand in both of his.

There was something in the tone that made her forget everything except that he was living, and, despite the restraint of her lips, her full heart answered:

"Do not leave me now, Grant! It will kill me if you do!"

A new light broke in upon him, and he dropped upon his knees beside her.

"Is it possible that you love *me*, Lucy?" he exclaimed, raising her head, and filling her face with the radiance of his devotion.

She twined her white arms around his neck, and with her head upon his breast the silent answer flooded his soul with a music softer and sweeter than Æolian voices. And so, resting peacefully in his arms, the grandmother found them when she re-entered the room.

As she looked at them, tears glistened behind her glasses, for across her eyes flitted, perhaps, a sunny vision of the past, when love first led her through its fields of green.

"Just as it should be!" she said, placing her hands upon Grant's broad shoulders. "I always thought, when you were children together, and loved each other without knowing it, that it would come to this!"

It was a very improper thing for Mark to do, but Martha countenanced the outrage, and he could not resist. Taking her by the hand, with the remark that he feared something heart-rending had occurred in Mr. Brinton's room, he noiselessly shoved the door ajar and peeped roguishly in. The situation was satisfactory. He flung the door wide open, and beckoning to those in the parlor, stepped in.



"You see, my worst fears have been realized, Martha!" said Mark, in a sepulchral voice. "There they are, locked in a desperate death struggle! But, with all its terrors, the picture is beautiful. Don't move, Grant, and, to relieve your embarrassment, we will enlarge the group!" and, taking the unresisting Martha in his arms, he assumed a classic attitude.

"Am I needed?" inquired Mr. Brinton, looking in upon the interesting tableau.

"Yes," promptly replied Grant, rising. "There seems to have been some misapprehension, and Lucy and myself——"

"I believe I understand you," interrupted Mr. Brinton. "I have made one selection for Lucy and failed, and am content that she should now choose for herself—especially, since it seems that the choice is an old matter of the heart, and gives promise of being as agreeable to her as it will be satisfactory to me."

"Have you come to the last act?" inquired Joe, suddenly appearing at the door.

"No," answered Mark; "that will be presented to-morrow evening, and the curtain will drop on a double wedding!"

"Worse than that!" returned Joe. "Jennie and I will stand in for another rattle, for I believe Bangs had a little too much champagne aboard to tie a very hard knot. We've got to be tolerably well ac-

quainted by this time, and I don't want the knot to slip!"

Mark was right. The last act of the drama in which he had played so conspicuous a part was rendered at the Brinton mansion the following evening, when Martha Bouton became the wife of Allen Warner, and Lucy laid her hand trustingly in Grant's broad palm and called him husband. This time the ceremonies were not interrupted, but something like an exultant war-whoop from Joe signalized their conclusion, and threw a look akin to consternation over the smileless face of the clergyman.

Their bridal tour embraced a visit to Grant and Martha's relatives in Buffalo, as well as the parents of Mark, who were wild with joy at his return. Mark forgave the unjust suspicion of his father, which for a time had made him a voluntary outcast; and although the wound was healed, it was plain to both that the scar would remain through life.

Orville Bement committed suicide by jumping from the train on which he was being taken to New York, after a hearing on a writ of *habeas corpus* had resulted in remanding him to custody. As neither money nor drafts were found in his possession at the time of his arrest, it was believed that all that remained of the robbery had been invested with Mr. Brinton, and with the consent of Dr. Bement

the interest was transferred to Grant without the publicity of a contest.

Mr. and Mrs. Braxton spent the most of the summer in travel. They visited Jennie's relatives in Iowa, and Joe's nearest of kin, an uncle, in Missouri, and early in the autumn returned to California.

After embarking in and abandoning two or three different pursuits, Joe finally purchased a grain and stock farm in the Coast Range, and is now the patriarch of a large family, with cattle on a hundred hills assessed to his affluent ownership.

Before the gold and purple of their honeymoon had faded into quieter hues, Grant and Mark with their wives returned to California. They had found hope in its generous hills, and under its sunny skies were content to rear their altars.

Having interests in San Francisco, there Grant made his home, and for more than twenty years has been recognized as one of the leading and respected citizens of that city.

Having been educated to no especial pursuit, although fond of declaring that he was a competent blacksmith, and possessing the necessary means, Mark fitted himself for the bar, and is now a prominent lawyer in one of the interior counties of California.

Martha's eldest son bears the name of Grant, while in the first of Lucy's daughters, whose name is Martha, is also perpetuated the interwoven romance of their younger years.

They yearly meet around the Christmas board, and when the Braxtons add their presence, as they sometimes do, the curtain of a quarter of a century is drawn aside, and little heed is given to the hours that pass.

Years ago apoplexy laid its hand on Jonas Scully, and his death was almost the only act of his married life that had not shocked the propriety of his disconsolate helpmeet.

After receiving the five thousand dollars from Bement, Skates fell in love with a buxom bar-maid and proposed marriage. She objected to the brilliant color of his nose, and he took the pledge and died in a desperate attempt to bleach it.

The lives of all who battled with the pioneer years of California are more or less tinged with romance; but through the experiences of few have circumstances woven a chain of events more dramatic than the record, now closed, of a few plain Western people.

**THE END.**

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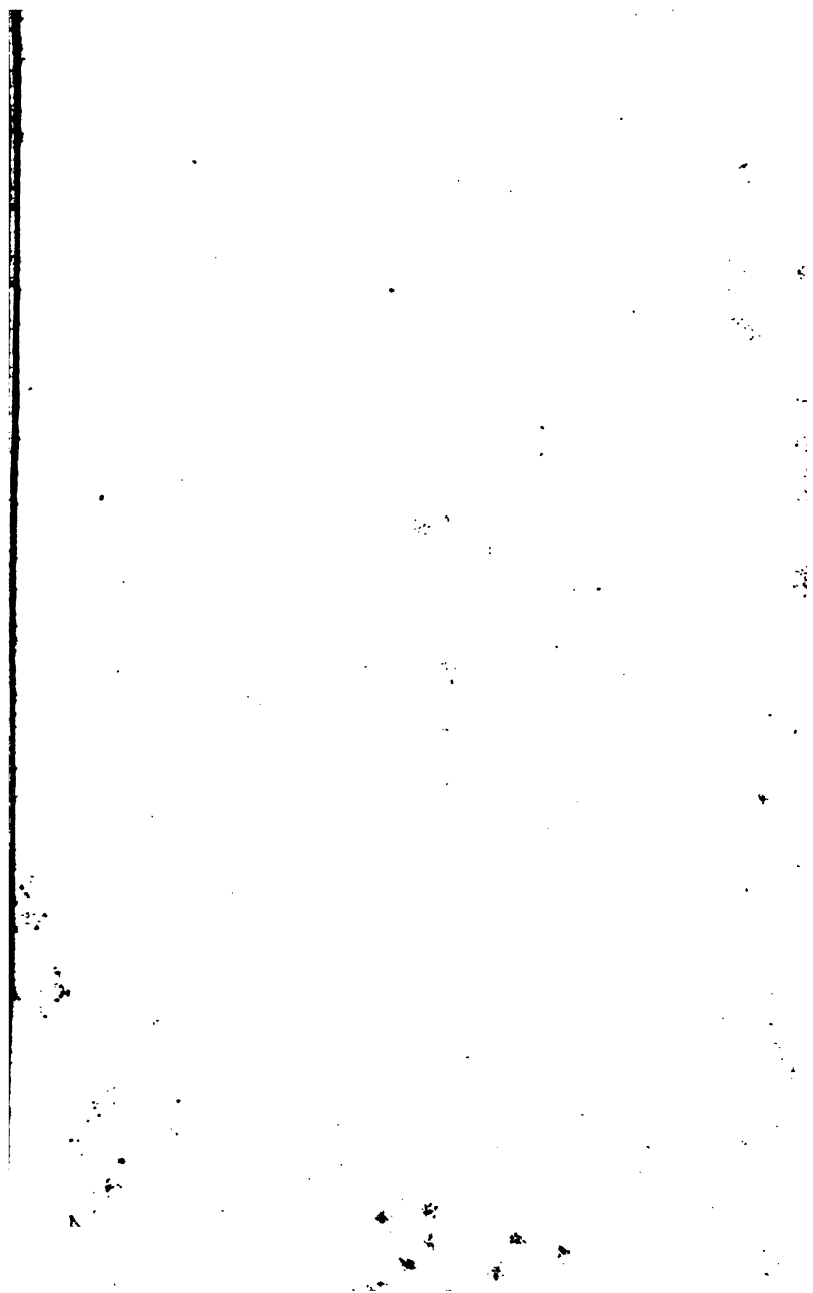
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